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MARRIAGE: OVERVIEW OF BENEFITS AND FUTURE DIRECTION IN THE UNITED
STATES

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to support the claim that married people are better off, to serve as an argument for promoting and valuing the institution of marriage and to grasp the developing changes of marriage. Many researchers recognize the importance and rewards marriage in the United States brings to individuals, and my goal was to bring a compilation of marital research over the years, combined with a personal standpoint that marriage is in fact good. The question of whether marriage makes people happier, or happy people are more likely to get married was examined. Marriage was compared to cohabitation in terms of couple's relationship quality and satisfaction. Arguments that suggest marriage is not universally beneficially were considered, and finally, a debate of the possible future outcomes was reviewed.

Most research found a positive association between marriage and greater physical, emotional, financial and sexual advantages. Married couples themselves also ranked their relationship quality higher in satisfaction compared to cohabiting couples. Evidence also indicates that marriage was not selective, meaning happy people were no more likely to wed than depressed individuals. In conclusion, the evidence supports the belief that marriage is an ever accepting and embracing institution, granting equal benefits to individuals regardless of health, emotional stability, personalities, or family backgrounds. I believe that this report grants a more organized, systematic framework for discussing marriage effects, in a time when the institution is weakening. My hope is that having more information on the benefits of marriage will give greater incentives for individuals to marry.

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Introduction

Marriage has always been a central feature of western culture and family life. Many researchers and scholars argue that marriage-based families are the “basic building blocks of society” (Spalding, 2004). It is in the family that children learn the meaning and expression of love. It is in our early childhood that we observe and learn how to form healthy and long-lasting relationships. It could be argued that the survival and endurance of marriage is central to loving families and healthy communities. Marriage is one of the few social institutions that teaches us how to love and be loved. If the institution of marriage continues to weaken, our society may be losing a source of comfort, happiness, and a stable family life.

In modern societies like the one we have in the U.S., marriage serves as a binding promise couples make to honor, serve and love one another for the rest of their lives. For some individuals, the words, “till death do us part” seem too daunting a phrase for them to commit. With changes in societal norms, and America becoming more individually focused, some have felt less pressure from family and society to marry, or stay married. With these recent changes, several new transitions in marriage and the family have taken place, including a greater number of cohabitating couples, a rise in divorce, an increase in out of wed-lock births and a rise in the age of marriage (Bumpass & Lu 2000). As a growing number of individuals choose to remain single longer, divorce or cohabit, will they miss out on one of life’s greatest and most rewarding lifetime benefits?

Although marriage in the United States is an institution that has been changing and evolving over the past sixty years, I will argue that marriage remains just as valuable today as in earlier times (Cherlin, 2004). Evidence still shows that once couples wed they receive priceless and numerous benefits that singles are unable to obtain. The benefits of marriage even exceed

those obtained from long-lasting, committed cohabiting relationships. Married couples are blessed with greater physical, emotional, sexual, and financial assets, all of which have been shown to be directly linked to couples living longer, accumulating more wealth, and experiencing higher levels of life satisfaction. With the cultural shifts and historical changes America has experienced, it is our acceptance of the changing meaning and adaptation of marriage and family that has to be embraced.

Just as nothing comes without an opposing argument, marriage has its critics. I devote a large portion of my thesis on addressing the range of arguments against marriage. Waite and Gallagher (2000) in their celebrated book, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially*, address many of the critic's beliefs about marriage. In the end, I will show that the research clearly indicates that marriage is an important institution, granting individuals many significant benefits.

In summary, this thesis will review a variety of marriage topics and carefully weigh evidence of marriage's benefits. Hopefully those that read this thesis will gain a greater understanding of the actual importance of marriage in American society, for adults and for children.

1. Benefits in the U.S.

As George Stands states, “there is only one happiness in life, to love and be loved”. All humans have a desire for ever-lasting love. In fact, most Americans have reported that having a happy and successful marriage is a top priority in their life (Crockett & Beebe, 2002). To have and share love with another human being is something that most of us long for, but what about love makes individuals want to take it to the next level, that is, to marry? Why not just stay together in a happy, but single, lifestyle? Research studies by Linda Waite, a professor of sociology and co-author of the book *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially*, argues that heterosexual marriage is an institution that offers a wide variety of advantages and benefits to couples that singles do not experience (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Advocates of marriage and researchers affirm that there are key advantages of marriage that lead to greater physical, emotional, sexual, and financial happiness (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Waite’s research explains how,

“Married people live longer, have better health, earn more money and accumulate more wealth, have more satisfying sex lives, happier children, feel more fulfilled in their lives, enjoy more satisfying sexual relationships, and have happier and more successful children than those who remain single, cohabitate, or get divorced” (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead are experts in the social and cultural aspects of marriage. In the 2000 report from the National Marriage Project, they wrote,

“Marriage is a fundamental social institution. It is central to the nurture and raising of children. It is the 'social glue' that reliably attaches fathers to children. It contributes to the physical, emotional and economic health of men, women and children, and thus to the nation as a whole. It is also one of the most highly prized of all human relationships and a central life goal of most Americans" (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2003, pg. 4).

Forever Families (2002) is a well researched site for the advocacy of marriage. Their main goal is to provide the best and most useful knowledge on strengthening marriage and families. The article on “Making the Case for Marriage” exemplifies the benefits of marriage, of which there are numerous. Jennifer Crockett and Marisa Beebe, authors of the article, note that, marriage improves individuals’ perceptions about themselves and their future. They have a greater outlook on life, and marriage helps them develop into their whole selves, helping form their identity (2002).

The goal of this first section is to describe the various ways that marriage offers greater advantages to couples who wed. Evidence from research will show that marriage is associated with many physical, emotional, sexual, and financial benefits. In section two I explain why these benefits cause married couples to be happier, healthier and more financially stable than singles.

1.1. Physical Health Benefits

Crockett and Beebe (2002), in *Making the Case for Marriage*, highlight some of the differences in physical health benefits between married couples and those who are single, divorced, widowed or separated. Not being married can have detrimental effects on one’s health. For example, both unmarried men and women show higher rates of depression, heart disease, suicide and other physical and emotional deficits compared to marrieds. This suggests a causal link between marriage and well-being, that is, marriage grants a certain amount of life protection (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

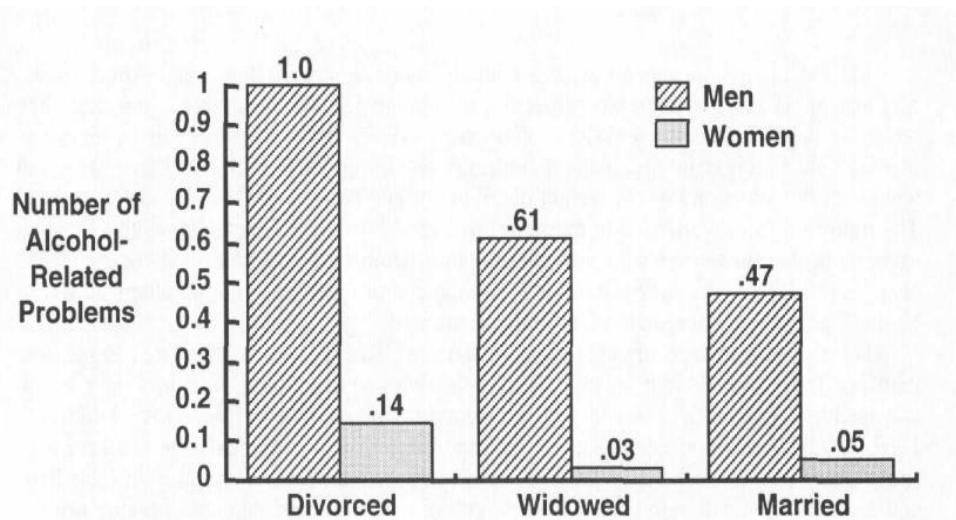
As Waite and Gallagher describe, “not being married is one of the greatest risks that people voluntarily subject themselves to” (2002, pg 48). According to Waite & Gallagher (2000), marriage acts as a life support and increases survival. Because married men and women have

healthier lifestyles, life expectancy is dramatically higher (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Marriage seems to reduce hazardous health risks, while supporting longevity and endurance. In other words, as Wilson and Oswald assert, “the health of never married and divorced men deteriorates approximately 15% faster than that of married men” (2005, pg. 15). Harold Morowitz, a professor at Yale University, examined at the health link and age-standardized death rates in numerous states and found that “divorce seemed to be about as dangerous to a man’s health as picking up a pack-a-day cigarette habit” (Waite & Gallagher, 2000, pg. 47).

The research on marital health has consistently shown the same results: Married men and women are healthier individuals compared to those who are divorced, separated, single or widowed (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Additionally, research conducted on middle-aged men and women found that wives who were married rated their health as excellent or very good by 30 percent more than single women their same age. Men who were married likewise showed these same positive health effects compared to same age single men (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

These various health findings inform us of the intrinsic health advantage that is found within the context of marriage (Wilson & Oswald, 2005). Marriage serves as a protector against disease, illness, poverty, loneliness and other negative health risks ranging from the common cold to various types of cancer (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). An additional study examined the outcomes of hospital patients and concluded that married people are not only less likely to be sick or die in a hospital, but are more likely to heal faster compared to unmarried people (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Research tells us that for men especially, marriage can increase their life year expectancy up to 10 years longer than single men. This is similar to married women who have been shown to exceed the life expectancy of single women by 5 years (Dobson, 2008).

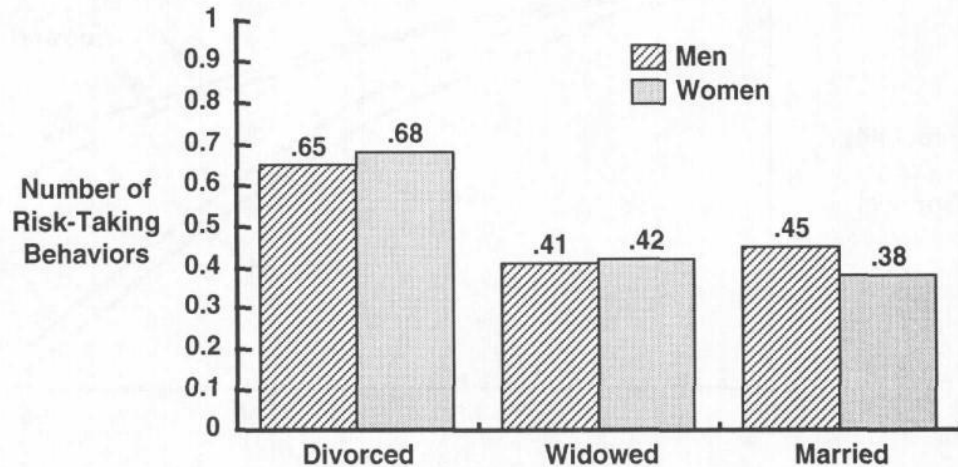
Linda Waite, in her presidential address to the Population Association of America, argues that marriage benefits not only the couple, but to society as well (Waite, 1995). For example, Figure 1.1 below shows that married men have fewer alcohol related problems than unmarried men (Umberson, 1987, as cited in Waite, 1995). Figure 1.2 shows that married individuals participate in less risk-taking behaviors than unmarried individuals, including driving too fast, engaging in reckless and careless fights, and getting into trouble at work. A more extensive list shows negative health behaviors including drinking and driving, substance use, and the failure to maintain an orderly lifestyle are also more commonly displayed unmarried people. Results deemed that on every dependent variable except marijuana use, divorced and widowed individuals are more likely to engage in these negative health patterns than married individuals (Umberson, 1987).



SOURCE: Umberson (1987)

Figure 5. Reports of Problem Drinking in the Past Year, by Marital Status and Sex

Figure 1.1



SOURCE: Umberson (1987)

Figure 6. Reports of Risk-Taking Behavior in the Past Year, by Marital Status and Sex

Figure 1.2

There appears to be something intrinsically valuable in marriage that protects individuals from health risks plaguing single men and women. They are not only experiencing healthy lives, but marriage is preserving one's mortality. Although reasons for this finding will be discussed in section two, having a committed life partner is a proven benefactor for married couples (Umberson, 1987).

1.2. Mental and Emotional Health Benefits

Marriage for most couples is associated with a higher quality of living. Research has found that marital status was correlated to one's level of happiness. Divorced and widowed individuals, in contrast, report feeling considerably less happy, more emotionally unstable and in greater distress than married individuals report (Kim & McKenry, 2002).

Individual's mental health consistently and significantly improves with the onset of marriage, while divorce or separation deteriorates mental health, resulting in higher levels of depression, higher levels of stress and anxiety, and lower levels of overall happiness. Individuals who experience a divorce or separation report increases in problem drinking, drugs and other

unhealthy emotional responses. These findings suggest that the act of getting married is associated with the growth of positive mental and emotional health, while the act of leaving marriage puts an individual at risk for greater emotional instability and unhappiness (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

According to researchers, married individuals suffer from less depression, anxiety and other psychological disorders, than singles. They are also three times less likely to commit suicide than those who are widowed or divorce (Kim & McKenry, 2002). Waite and Gallagher conducted a survey of 14,000 adults, over a ten-year period, and found that marital status was a very important predictor of a person's overall happiness. Their data showed 40 percent of married individuals reported that they were very happy. In contrast, only 25 percent of single or cohabitating people said they were happy with their lives, and only 15 percent of separated or divorced individuals reported that they were very happy (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Married couples are able to handle more stress in their lives, and in a healthier way than singles (Crockett & Beebe, 2002). Married couples also report less loneliness in their lives while feeling happier and better about themselves (Crockett & Beebe, 2002).

1.3. Sexual Benefits

As Crockett and Beebe describe, "Marriage offers the most secure, rewarding, and emotionally safe context for sharing physical intimacy" (Crockett & Beebe, 2002, pg. 1). The love expressed through sexual acts in marriage is has been shown to be of higher quality, linked with deeper love, have stronger meaning, all of which create greater satisfaction for couples (Crockett & Beebe, 2002). Edward Laumann and his colleagues at the University of Chicago conducted the National Sex Survey, a representative sample of 3,500 American adults who were asked detailed questions about their sexual behavior. Analysis of the responses showed that

married people not only have more sex, but are more sexually satisfied, both physically and emotionally, than those who are single (Laumann, Gagnon & Michael, 2000). Results from the survey concluded that:

“43 percent of the married men reported that they had sex at least twice a week. Only 26 percent of the single men (not cohabiting) said that they had sex this often, and the divorced men were no more active than the never married guys. It was much the same for women: wives had more active sex lives than all types of single women except cohabiters; 39 percent of married women had sex two or three times a week or more, compared to 20 percent of single women” (Laumann et al., 2000, pg. 79).

McManus and Colson go on to conclude that:

“Married women are almost twice as likely as divorced and never-married women to have a sex life that exists and is extremely emotionally satisfying. About four out of ten wives have a sexual partner who leaves them extremely emotionally satisfied, compared to only about one out of four never-married women, and one out of five previously married women” (2008, pg. 87).

As the above quote suggests, marriage provides individuals with the possibility of very satisfying sex lives. Married couples rely on physical intimacy and trust more so than singles involved in a sexual relationship. Women are more selective in choosing who their sexual partners are compared to men. Women have further motivation to find a trusting and loyal sexual partner since they are the ones to carry a child (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Therefore, women have greater investment in making sure their partner is of their standard and quality in case the sexual act led to pregnancy. They have a stronger desire to make sure the person they are sleeping with loves them, cares for them and will care for their children, thus increasing their incentive to have sex with someone who is likely to offer these qualities, like a woman’s ideal husband (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). With regard to the National Sex Survey, it was found that commitment increases sexual pleasure for both sexes. Both men and women reported that the

emotional bond of the sexual relationship that they have with one another is important (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Thus, for married couples, engaging in sex allows them to fully express their love and commitment to one another, in ways that are difficult for unmarried or cohabiting couples to do. As Waite and Gallagher states, “Every time a married couple makes love, they may be reminding each other of the marital promises: to love, honor, cherish, and care for each other-and their children-until death do they part” (Waite & Gallagher, 2000, pg. 96).

1.4. Financial Benefits

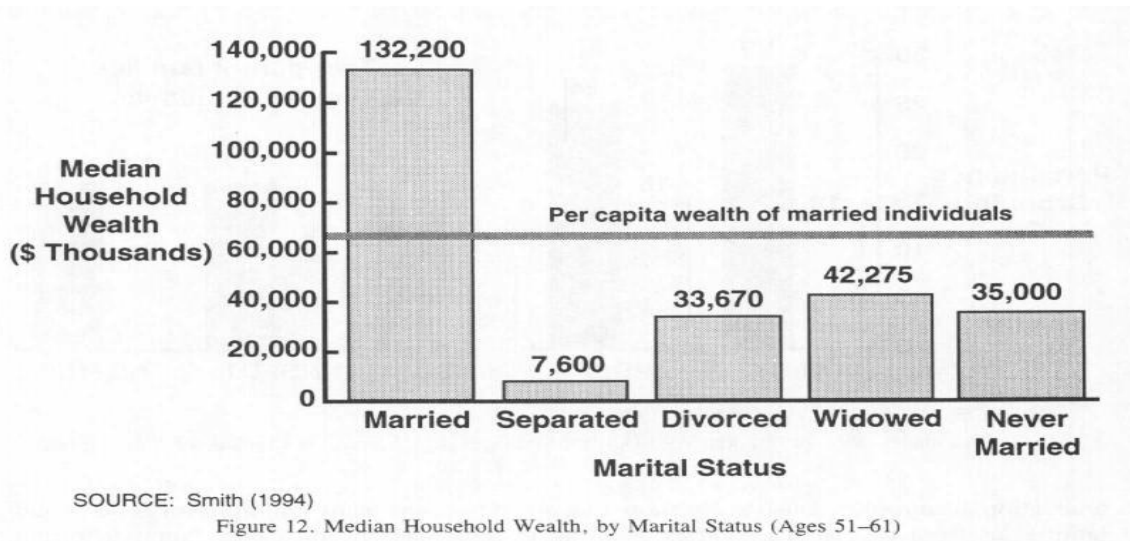
David Popenoe and Barbara Whitehead wrote an article entitled, *Why Wed?* outlining the economic benefits of marriage (1999). This research shows that the financial benefits of married couples can be summarized by three facts. One, marriage is economical, in that it promotes careful spending, two, marriage encourages savings, and three, marriage increases men’s wages (Popenoe & Whitehead, 1999).

Data from a recent U.S. Census gives a clear picture of how much married couples benefit financially. In 2000, “the median income for married couple households was \$56,676, while single male household income was \$37,396, and single-female household income was \$23,732” (Wells & Zinn, 2004, pg. 60). Perhaps rather obviously, married couple households have a higher median income because of their often two wage earnings (Popenoe & Whitehead, 1999). In addition, married couples experience the economic benefits of shared pensions, shared social security benefits, and so have the potential to purchase greater luxuries with their combined incomes (Wells & Zinn, 2004).

Married couples benefit further financially from what is called economics of scale; meaning, two can live as cheaply as one (Wells & Zinn, 2004). Married couples have the

potential to jointly purchase a single home with one TV, vacuum, dishwasher, and so forth. This way of living enables married people to save more than singles, who have to make purchases on their own. Furthermore, married couples have been shown to save more because they tend to keep their spouse in mind and think more about their future together (Wells & Zinn, 2004). In other words, married couples are more likely than singles to begin planning on buying a house, getting financially secure to start a family, and to start saving for their child’s education. They may feel a sense of duty to provide for one another, to put their family’s needs before their own selfish spending desires, and this means saving money instead of spending it on sports cars or fancy clothing (Rindfuss and VandenJeuvel, 1990, as cited in Waite, 1995).

Figure 1.4 below shows just how much more married couples benefit over single couples financially. This data chart shows median household wealth, estimated by Smith (1994) from the Health and Retirement Survey, for married couples, the separated, the divorced, the widowed, and the never married.



“This measure of wealth includes pension and Social Security wealth as well as real assets, financial assets, and the value of the primary residence. The horizontal line shows per capita wealth for married-couple households (which by definition have two adults) and allows us to compare the per capita wealth level for married-couple households

with those of other households. Any level falling below this line marks the disadvantage of unmarried persons relative to married individuals” (Smith, 1994, as cited in Waite, 1995, pg. 493).

Marriage tends to increase a majority of men’s income (Crockett & Beebe, 2002). Once married, men see it as their newly formed role to work harder in order to support their family financially. Married men are more invested in their work, and have greater ambition to put forth greater effort. This driven attitude leads to promotions and higher salaries. In fact, “on average, marriage increases a couple’s income by about \$1,800 for every year of marriage” (Crockett & Beebe, 2002, pg. 1). A secure and strong marriage, where the couples share assets and incomes, can go a long way toward protecting against poverty and financial strain.

1.5. Benefits for Children

There is a wide variety of evidence that children benefit from having married parents (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). There are several reasons for this. One of the reasons is married couples have more money to invest in their kids, whether that means buying more diapers and formula or saving up for college. They also have more time to devote to their children as both parents can often make sure one or both of them is always available. In contrast, single parents often have to work long hours, work two jobs, or are too stressed and not emotionally or physically available to their child (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Because there are two of them, married couples are likely to be more invested in their children, more likely to spend quality time engaging in activities, and more likely to give their child more supervision (Waite, 1995).

Children will thrive with two parents, as long as the couple’s relationship is not based on high conflict (Crockett & Beebe, 2002). Many studies have shown that having two parents positively affects the development of children. Children, who live with both of their biological parents tend to have better academic performance, less criminal behavior, less premarital sex,

stronger parent-child emotional bonds, better physical and emotional health, and suffer from less abuse (Crockett & Beebe, 2002).

In short, children in marriages tend to be protected against the risks of dropping out of school, poverty, and physical and emotional neglect (Wilson, 2005). Children raised in a married household, are less likely to engage in delinquency as compared to children raised in single households. It is clear that a family's stability affects the development of a child. Stable and happy households will directly support the healthy well-being of the child, and the quality of the parent-child relationship (Wilson, 2005).

2. Reasons Married Couples Are Better Off

Research shows that marriage is associated with substantial physical, mental, emotional, financial and sexual health benefits. In fact, getting married probably increases one's overall happiness and well-being (Waite, 1995). The purpose of this next section is to review the potential reasons married couples seem to be at a greater advantage, why they experience all these greater benefits, compared to their single counterparts. Explanations provided will be that (a), marriage is a "ready-made" support system, (b), that marriage comes with expectations about how to behave; and (c), that marriage encourages long-term investment.

2.1. Marriage is a "ready-made" support system.

Marriage provides an encouraging and supportive spouse who can help buffer against stress (Crockett & Beebe, 2002). Part of being married means you are equipped with having a long-term companion, someone with whom can offer you advice and guidance. Simply having someone to help you handle your problems, or to lend a listening ear, has shown to be a crucial and beneficial part of marriage. You always have someone to share your inner thoughts, feelings, desires and fears with, helping to protect individuals against feelings of isolation and loneliness. Married individuals have someone that helps balance their life. Spouses encourage healthy behaviors and positive thinking. They offer support and encouragement which reduces stress and increases one's psychological well-being, causing them to feel better about themselves, their life and possible future events (Crockett & Beebe, 2002).

Many married couples admit to marrying their best friend, someone that they feel comfortable being exactly who they are with (Pennebaker, 1997). Part of the support system that marriage grants is the ability to self-disclose, letting another person hear your inner thoughts,

feelings and desires. Couples share a vast amount of empathy, understanding, and honesty. Opening up and self disclosing to a spouse is seen as a separate and more powerful connection than simply talking to a close friend. Likewise, marriage is not just emotionally beneficial simply because you have someone to talk to. The experience of having a supportive and emotionally responsive spouse with whom you can share your personal self with, share your stresses and traumatic events with, and take safety in an intimate friendship, boosts married individual's emotional and psychological well-being (Pennebaker, 1997).

Married couples report wanting to open up and talk more deeply with their partners about their worries and disappointments rather than to visit a therapist. This simple fact suggests that most individuals are having their emotional needs met and satisfied within their marriage. Their spouse is the number one person they seek to confide in and because of their feelings of security and comfortableness in their relationship; they experience greater emotional, physical, and mental benefits (Pennebaker, 1997).

Reciting wedding vows is a promise that you will eternally love the other person. This commitment motivates both spouses to serve as types of monitoring system for one another. Couples take an added interest in preserving one another's health and longevity (Crockett & Beebe, 2002). Couples tend to want to do all they can to ensure they live as many years as possible together. Once married, both spouses, but especially wives, take on this monitoring system by reminding each other to take medications, encouraging regular doctor's appointments and checkups, and watching each other's weight, cholesterol and so forth (Crockett & Beebe, 2002).

Married men and women have been known to suffer from fewer physical health ailments, ranging from the common cold to various types of cancer (Crockett & Beebe, 2002). Crockett

and Beebe (2002) researched this idea and gave explanations as to why this occurs. They argue that wives are proven to serve as encouragement and a support system to their husbands who deal with daily problems and life stressors that could otherwise lead them to abuse alcohol and other risky behaviors (2002). Additionally, married men suffer from fewer illnesses and other sicknesses because they have a larger social network compared to singles. This outside support system acts as a defense against various health risks, in that, social support helps to boost the immune system, relating directly to better health (Crockett & Beebe, 2002). However, another possible explanation for a decrease in stress and anxiety is that spouses are there to share the burden. Given this, it may not be surprising that married people report lower rates of depression relative to single individuals.

Scott Haltzman, in his book, *The Secrets of Happy Families*, elaborates on why marriage benefits couples, apart from the three previously discussed. He argues that marriage is good for the brain; married people tend to have sharper minds and experience less memory loss and dementia later in life (Mishori, 2009). This is because marriage promotes exercise and social interaction. Furthermore, having a partner that brings challenges, as well as intelligent and stimulating conversations to your day will also increase brain activity while simultaneously decreasing the chances of Alzheimer's and other memory problems (Mishori, 2009).

The "ready-made" support system married couples are equipped with is linked to not only protecting against illnesses and buffering stress, but helping each other to recover faster when a spouse is in poor health (Kim & McKenry, 2002). Evidence by Waite and Gallagher (2000) report that singles remain in hospitals longer than married individuals; they are also more likely to die after surgery and have a slower recovery period in comparison to married people.

2.2. Marriage comes with sexual exclusivity and other expectations about how to behave.

Being married comes with an explicit and underlying basic understanding about how you and your spouse should be behaving in your relationship. Marriage in western cultures come with expectations about sexual exclusivity and behaving responsibly. Although discovering accurate rates of adultery in marriage is a complicated task since most people hide the truth, statistics of infidelity and cheating from 2002-2009 show that 25% of men were unfaithful to their wives at least once in their marriage, and 15% of women had affairs outside their marriage (Infidelity Statistics, 2002-2009).

McNulty and Karney believe that marital expectations are necessary in order to maintain healthy and happy relationships (2004). Simply put, “positive expectations lead to positive outcomes” (McNulty & Karney, 2004, pg. 729). Having high, but appropriate, standards of one’s marriage has been shown to increase the relationship functioning, marital adjustment, and satisfaction (McNulty & Karney, 2004). In this study, McNulty and Karney felt that expectations in marriage were defined with abstract ideas. These expectations consisted of whether their partner:

“will always take time for me when I need him/her, will agree with me about the important things, will get along well with my parents, will never disappoint me, will always take care of me, will always be attractive to me, and will always make me happy” (McNulty & Karney, 2004, pg. 743).

There are other expectations. Marriage appears to inhibit one from taking up risky behavior that may have at one point been a part of their daily single life. This includes things such as, partying all night, drinking excessively, and engaging in minor forms of delinquency. Single men drink twice as much as married men (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Marriage, it seems, brings out the best in one another, and couples would rather spend time together than out in the

clubs with their friends. This is because of marriage's expectations about how each individual should be behaving. Married men engage in less of the "bachelor syndrome" where single men often engage in risqué or reckless behavior, such as heavy drinking, promiscuity, engage in less bar fights as well as consume less drugs and alcohol (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Marriage seems to enable men to grow up and settle down. Men are said to become more responsible and mature while both couples are expected to give up certain risky behaviors and to remain sexually exclusive. In short, marriage serves as a protector from self-destructive behaviors (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

In *Why Marriage Matters*, an article published by the Institute for American Values, Bradford Wilcox argues that marriage is good for transforming men into mature and responsible adults who are more involved with their families (2005). He explains how married men are much more involved and show higher amounts of affection to their wives and children than men living in cohabiting relationships, either with or without children (Wilcox, 2005). Wilcox gives reasonable evidence that the act of marriage again places certain expectations and demands on both the husband and wife concerning the way they treat one another. Marriage, to some people, is the most sacred relationship you can form with another person, thus explaining the increase in some men's love and affection compared to other living arrangements.

Marriage is not only a good influence on one's social behavior, but marriage grants couples greater sexual satisfaction in their relationship. Sexual exclusivity is a major expectation on married individuals, yet research shows that marriage allows for greater sexual pleasure in their relationship, a factor that keeps couples together. With marriage, couples strive to give their complete love and attention to their spouse. This consequently leads to couples having "more confidence in the fidelity of his or her partner, less anxiety about sexual performance, fewer fears

of sexual abandonment, and less cause for sexual jealousy” (Waite & Gallagher, 2000, pg. 24). It can be easily argued that a main reason why married people have more sex is that they have a readily accessible partner, it is easy to arrange, as finding time is compatible with their everyday life (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Married people experience greater sexual fulfillment for other reasons. Married men and women are more eager and have greater incentive to figure out what their partner’s sexual preferences are. Moreover, they themselves receive satisfaction in seeing their partner content; they want to please one another (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Being committed to one person in marriage encourages spending time focusing on the sexual wants and needs of their spouse. This is unlike singles, who tend to put their own sexual gratification above their partners. Both married men and women agree that they enjoy sex more when it is with a person that they have a loving relationship with. Therefore it was best said with this statement: “Demanding a loving relationship before having sex, using sex to express love, and striving to meet the sexual needs of one’s partner all increase satisfaction with sex” (Waite & Gallagher, 2000, pg. 89).

Waite and Gallagher observe that most people view the act of love as a significant act, a symbol for their strong feelings and commitment. They want sex to be love, an act of their love, a way of saying they will always love you and be with you, and to signal that they will take care of you and your children, something that sex in the context of marriage can attest to (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). In addition, only having sex with your married spouse eliminates threats of outside competition and therefore decreases anxiety in the bedroom, and enhances the sexual experience for both men and women. Married people know that the exclusive love that they give to their partner in a sexual act will be reciprocated to them, something that cannot be promised outside the marital bond (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Marital therapist David Schnarch has labeled what he has referred to as the sexual crucible to be a key advantage in sexual satisfaction in marriage (1991). He insists that the sexual intimacy between couples provides a safe and secure place to disclose both your physical and psychological identity during your most unprotected self. Those in a monogamous and committed relationship have this sexual crucible which allows for marked individual change and growth (Schnarch, 1991).

2.3. Marriage encourages long-term investment.

Marriage is an institution that encourages healthy behaviors and habits, and essentially turns couples from thinking about themselves, and their “short-term” pleasures to thinking about what their long-term goals as a couple are instead (Popenoe & Whitehead, 1999). These can range from planning their next vacation to setting up a savings account. Couples also are spending more time focusing on joint investments and shared future goals as opposed to finances for their own benefits. Marriage also serves as a protector against economic downfalls and unplanned disasters, adding further evidence for marriage being a long-term investment. This meaning that married couples who declare bankruptcy or fall into poverty are able to get back on their feet much easier and faster than single individuals, who are likely to live in poverty for an several years longer than married couples (Popenoe & Whitehead, 1999).

Marriage often also causes the couple to develop specialization in the household, that is, the separation of labor between the husband and wife (Baker & Jacobsen, 2007). Both the men and women take on separate roles in the house in order to increase productivity in the home. Specialization allows both the husband and wife to split the workload, specialize in only certain tasks, and each take responsibility for their share. Another advantage of specialization comes from the fact that individuals can by no means be good at everything, and specialization does not

require you to be this way. Spouses take on the roles and responsibilities that they are comfortable with, roles that they discuss and separate together. For some couples, the woman specializes in the majority of the household chores and the man concentrates on his job. In contrast, the majority of single people have no one with whom to share household responsibilities (Baker & Jacobsen, 2007). Many wives support their husband's careers, and take on added household chores in order to allow him to put forth more effort into his career in order to accumulate more wealth for the two of them (Waite, 1995). This specialization relates back to the reason why married men have higher pay than singles. The increased productivity in the home and the higher salary income for men both encourage long-term investment for couples (Baker & Jacobsen, 2007).

The very act of marriage is equivalent to long-term investment. Another way married couples display this concept is through taking added interest in one another's health (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Men might become easily turned off by the idea of a "nagging wife", yet research shows this is one prominent reason why men exhibit better physical health. Without the wives, who insist that their husbands go see a doctor when sick or to stop smoking, husbands would not inquire the same investment and motivation in staying healthy on their own. A requirement for loving someone more than yourself is that you invest in their health above all else; you want and need them around as long as possible. Furthermore, the marriage commitment to love them till death do you both part, in sickness and in health, encourages you to watch out for one another's health. Spouses who care about one another's well-being, as they should, encourage each other to take better care of themselves, and are there to give advice and support to one another regarding their health (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Wives are the ones who discourage drinking and encourage regular sleeping patterns. Many of them are the ones to

schedule the doctor appointment and they are constantly reminding them to take certain actions that will better their health (Umberson, 1987).

Conclusions from the three tentative hypotheses for why married people are better off comes from the fact that happy and healthy marriages come with a constant support system, expectations about how to behave while also encouraging long-term commitment. It is an institution that grants couples the freedom to self disclose and to feel understood and accepted by their spouse. Opposing arguments against the many benefits of marriage will be addressed in a later section, yet it should be noticed that with all of these advantages that the institution of marriage brings, it is not surprising that marriage offers couples a greater sense of happiness and overall well-being.

3. A. Criticisms of the conclusions that marriage is universally beneficial

Thus far, we have looked at the various advantages to couples who wed. I explained the various benefits that can be obtained from, happy and satisfying marriages. Yet, one important question that has not been assessed is the extent to which marriage yields beneficial outcomes. That is, do all marriages provide positive effects? Unfortunately not all marriages are healthy or satisfying for both spouses. It can be argued that many marriages unfortunately involve violence, neglect or abuse. Furthermore, some individuals marry too young, without parental approval or with little financial stability causing many psychologists to wonder if these types of marriages have the same positive outcomes as marriages that occur in more positive circumstances. Researchers, such as Amato & Previti, (2003) have also questioned whether marriage is equally beneficial to both women and men or across all social classes. Finally, some researchers have argued that some personality traits may be risk factors that lead to divorce. This next section will address these various topics in order to determine the extent to which marriage is a universally beneficial institution.

3.1 Not all marriages are equally positive in offering and sustaining satisfaction or happiness.

Marriage is said to offer both the husband and wife numerous benefits to their physical, mental and emotional well-being (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Despite this simple fact, marital quality is not usually on a constant high throughout all marriage years. The quality of marriage fluctuates across the course of the marriage, and “considering the span of years from premarriage through the end of the sixth year of marriage, relationship satisfaction is highest prior to marriage,

declines during the first 2.5 years, and stabilizes after approximately 4 years” (Newton & Keicolt-Glaser, 1995, pg. 602). Knowing that marital quality can change throughout the years does not mean that only with the passage of time does the relationship rise and fall, for there are certain socioemotional behaviors that can cause a downfall in the marital quality. The most common of these behaviors that erode the quality of marriage are “poor conflict management skills, especially on the part of husbands, invalidating interpersonal styles, and conflictive interactions” (Huston and Vangelisti, 1991 cited in Newton & Keicolt-Glaser, 1995, pg. 602). Evidence points to the idea that a steady decline in marital satisfaction is highly related to marital dissolution. During the event that a marriage declines in satisfaction to one or both spouses, wives especially may become very emotional and upset. Wives who feel as though their husbands are unable to respond to their emotions report greater dissatisfaction with their relationship, a pattern that is not as strong for husbands. Having a spouse who one feels is emotionally unresponsive can increase the risk that they will be unable to repair their unstable relationship (Newton & Keicolt-Glaser, 1995).

We know that marriage offers a wide range of benefits, but do these effects cover all married people, regardless of the happiness or satisfaction with their marriage? Research suggests that many couples are dissatisfied with their marriages (Wilson & Oswald, 2005). Some of the unhappiness is associated with financial distress. Those who are in poor health, are depressed, or are heavy drinkers are also more likely to report their marriage being unstable and not of high quality (Wilson & Oswald, 2005). Adults with less satisfying marriages report that their relationships with their family members and children suffer as well. That is, the stress and emotional drain of a poor relationship with their spouse creates a negative impact on their other relationships. In strong and healthy marriages, “each partner is a source of emotional support,

companionship, sexual gratification and economic support or assistance for the other” (Renne, 1970, pg. 54). In healthy marriages, couples support each other; however, to the extent that one spouse is not providing any one of these factors will inevitably damage the emotional, physical and social aspects of the marriage. Once couples begin to feel that these elements of a happy marriage are beginning to fade, the marriage may become unsatisfactory to one or both spouses, and lower their ability to show love and affection to the other. Couples instead will waste their time and energy in “frustrating or unrewarding exchanges with their spouse,” blocking their marriage from healing itself positively (Renne, 1970, pg 54).

Researchers have developed five dimensions of personal and family background that is used to predict levels of marital quality in a relationship. Those include, “personality traits, dimensions of the early social environment, attitudes concerning marriage, sexual history, and stressful life events incurred” (Kelly & Conley, 1987, pg. 29). Although I will later discuss in further detail in about dysfunctional personality traits that lead to marital dissolution, findings show that those who exhibit high levels of neuroticism and negative emotionality are more likely to belong to dissatisfied marriages. Higher dissatisfaction in marriage and early divorce was marked more by individuals, especially women, who had more romantic and sexual relationships before they wed (Kelly & Conley, 1987). The amount and frequency of stressful life events that the couple face will often times be another factor linked to low quality and marital dissolution in the future (Kelly & Conley, 1987).

In addition to these factors, the list of possible threats to healthy and happy marriages continues. Kelly and Conley describe in greater length further possible traits or experiences in one’s life that made them more susceptible to having either an increased or decreased probability for experiencing dissatisfaction in their marriage (1987). These factors include,

“Psychosocial instability of the family of origin: happiness of one's childhood, presence or absence of parental divorce, parents' marital happiness, level of conflict between parents, amount of love felt for father. Emotional closeness of the family of origin: amount of love felt for mother, level of conflict with one's mother, extent to which dates were discussed at home, voluntary attendance at church or synagogue. Nonconformity to social ideals: negative feelings about attending school, poor grades in school, level of conflict with one's father. Religious practice in the family of origin: regularity of church or synagogue attendance before 16 years of age, regularity of church or synagogue attendance, may suggest how the marital quality and satisfaction is present in the relationship” (Kelly & Conley, 1987, pg 29).

This research by Kelly and Conley shows just how many factors can affect one's later marital stability and happiness. The home environment in which each spouse was raised had a considerable impact on the marital quality as well (Kelly & Conley, 1987). Family interactions can either show us how to form healthy relationships, or they can be dysfunctional models that can bring harm to our later romantic relationships. Her findings show how those who come from an unstable family of origin, that showed a great deal of tension and disengagement, were more prone to carry these negative behaviors in their own families (Kelly & Conley, 1987).

In unhappy marriages, couples may not support or promote the dreams, interests or ambitions of one another and therefore couples have to either give up their passions or proceed without the support of their spouse.

“Involvement in an unhappy marriage is, then, analogous to functional disability: one who suffers from marital distress is limited in his relations with others, or socially “disabled,” just as a person suffering from a chronic heart condition is limited in his physical activities, or physically disabled” (Renne, 1970, pg.54).

Many couples will tell you of a time when their marital quality and satisfaction wavered. This is because to a certain extent, some dissatisfaction in a marriage is inevitable and universally common. Even for couples who are the most compatible and quarrel the least have their “down” moments. However, only a small proportion of marriages are reported to be

“unhappy”, that is, most consider their marriage at least satisfactory, with many believing their marriage is “very happy” (Renne, 1970, pg. 57). With as many as two-thirds of marriages ending in divorce today, we can begin to understand just how many couples report that they are in unhappy or unsatisfying marriages (Heaton & Albrecht, 1991).

Compromise and accommodation are the two key factors that researchers find makes marriages strong, and unsatisfactory marriages lack these basic skills (Gottman & Silver, 1995). Even in a marriage filled with conflict and days marked by frustration and disappointment, having these two skills can leave at least one spouse who feels they are receiving basic rewards, such as companionship and support. Likewise, even in couples who find themselves fighting constantly, can still find that their marriage brings about benefits to both spouses (Gottman & Silver, 1995). Some married couples, however, are somewhat beyond hope and may feel as though they do not even receive these basic advantages of marriage, examples of this will be discussed later, but include marriages that are formed in one’s early teens or involve abuse and violence (Gottman & Silver, 1995).

Marriages are being formed every day, yet this does not mean that these individuals are necessarily happier than if they were to stay single. For those “unhappy” marriages, those that lack the basic overall satisfaction and happiness sought after, they are sometimes forced to stay within the marriage for a number of reasons including “inertia, lack of money, a preference for the familiar, and, more significantly, each partner’s commitment to spouse and children, an emotional investment difficult to renounce” (Renne, 1970, pg. 54). The fact that many couples are choosing to stay in marriages that they deem unhappy, means that they are being deprived of all the benefits and rewards that happy marriages have to offer.

One factor that may contribute to the amount of marital quality is children (Thompson & Walker, 1989). Childless marriages were found to be of higher quality than marriages which contain children. One possible reason is that those couples without children have fewer financial stresses. Other reasons for this may be that the presence of a child adds considerable stress on the couple and they may gradually lose intimacy and affection towards one another. Furthermore, becoming a mother may mean that the wife gives up other important factors in her life that once fulfilled her and kept her happy, such as her career, social network and hobbies like outdoor recreation (Thompson & Walker, 1989).

One's physical health is also correlated with marital satisfaction (Wickrama, Lorenz, Conger & Elder, 1997). This is because physical health is so closely related to one's overall well-being and happiness, that how one rates their well-being is closely matched to how they rate their marital satisfaction. Marital quality then relies on having each couple be physically healthy and happy on their own. It is important to note, however, that the influence goes both ways; an unhappy marriage can affect one's health just as much as an illness can put a strain on a once happy marriage. Illnesses may mean that individuals can no longer provide the emotional and physical interaction and be responsive to their spouse in ways their husband or wife wishes them to interact (Wickrama et al., 1997).

Besides physical health, one's negative emotional well-being may bring about dissatisfaction in a marriage (Renne, 1970). Those who are depressed, have poor emotional health, and have low self confidence or morale have less satisfaction in their marriages. Examples of people in this category would be those who live in poverty and see no hope for a financially stable future, those who stay married for the sake of the children alone, and those suffering from a long-term disorder or chronic illness. Those who are also suffering from

depression, loneliness or are emotionally unstable are more likely to view their marriage with less satisfaction. These associations show how one's level of morale and psychological well-being is strongly linked to marital satisfaction (Renne, 1970). Although many individuals suffering from depression have marriages that lift their spirits and make them happier, many depressed individuals are not as fortunate. Marriages that have one spouse feeling negative or depressed on a daily basis will likely bring a considerable amount of strain on the couple (Renne, 1970).

Those individuals who were heavy drinkers were also more likely to have lower levels of marital satisfaction (Gottman & Silver, 1995). Those who heavily drink could be reacting to an unsatisfying marriage, or vice versa, where drinking can be a major factor in developing an unhappy marriage, especially for the other spouse. Drinking may cause many problems in one's home, such as an increase in arguments, physical and emotional unresponsiveness, and thus leads to spouses considering their marriage unsatisfactory. In sum, one or both spouses drinking can be seen as a cause or the effect of marital dissatisfaction (Gottman & Silver, 1995).

One last common downfall in marriages that often leads to a decrease in marital satisfaction is the couple's ties to social networks (Renne, 1970). Couples who had only a few close personal relatives and friends were the ones who felt a greater dissatisfaction with their spouse. Therefore, the more social network one belongs to, how well one feels they belong and how many people one feels close to is related to their level of marital satisfaction. Social isolates were much more likely to be unhappily married. The link between how many close friends and social ties a person had and the level of one's marital satisfaction suggests that those in unhappy marriages were the ones that tended to be withdrawn and had trouble keeping and maintaining close knit ties with others (Renne, 1970). These individuals were thus more likely to develop

feelings of isolation and depression which they carried over into their marriages. This caused them to not create a strong companionship and emotional tie to their spouse, and thus both them and their mate felt their marital quality diminish (Renne, 1970).

With the research on the factors that lead to marital dissatisfaction and a decrease in overall marital happiness, we know that one's physical and mental well-being is closely tied to marital satisfaction (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Having a positive view of oneself and being emotionally stable are keys to maintaining an intimate relationship with one's spouse and ensuring long-term marital stability. Furthermore, the amount of drinking, social networking, conflict and children in the marriage are other ways in which marriages can be unsatisfying to couples (Renne, 1970; Gottman & Silver, 1995).

3.2 Marital Conflict

When we think of marriage, we tend to think of two people, in love, living their days for one another. Inspiring as this is, it is not the reality for many couples. Not all marriages are a match made in Heaven. Marriages are dissolving every day. Couples are continuously falling in and out of love, and the reasons are diverse and complex. Marital conflict has been a strong leader in the role of marital disruption, affecting hundreds of thousands of couples (DeMaris, 2000). Self reports and retrospective studies provide insight into how marital conflict, both physical and verbal, plays into marital satisfaction and eventual dissolution. For the intent of clarity, I will focus solely on verbal conflict during this section, as I will discuss physical conflict in terms of violence and abuse in a later section (DeMaris, 2000).

Verbal conflict, as studies show, is comprised of a variety of dimensions. It includes how often couples are in open disagreement with one another involving common discussions such as

“household tasks, money, spending time together, sex, in-laws and children” (DeMaris, 2000, pg. 686). In assessing verbal conflict, couples are also asked about the frequency of their conflicts and to what degree they disputed calmly and rationally or shouted to get their point across. Negative communication style, such as yelling and screaming influenced marital dissatisfaction between spouses. Couples who were constructive during conflict disputed with the intention of finding a happy resolution felt that their conflict did not play a major role into their marital satisfaction (DeMaris, 2000).

There are several factors that could be putting couples up for an increased risk of conflict in their relationship. Whether an individual’s parents had a high conflict marriage or even got divorced is a risk factor for conflict or dissolution in their own marriage. Further factors that played a role in the amount and frequency of verbal conflict came from whether a spouse was involved with drugs or alcohol, the couple struggled with financial stressors and the age at when the couple initially wed, with younger couples having elevated risk of conflict (DeMaris, 2000).

Women especially reported that hostile interactions with their spouse were a strong predictor in eventual divorce (DeMaris, 2000). Perhaps it is common sense, but couples in frequent conflict, report decreased feelings of marital satisfaction. Then it is not surprising that once satisfaction decreases, marital discord could follow. Marital conflict has devastating consequences on a once blissful marriage. In fact, many couples may not even realize just how much their conflict is hurting their relationship. The potential of divorce may be easy to detect by outside observers. High conflict marriages not only are characterized by frequent arguing, but by spouses who spend greater amounts of time away from each other, and stop engaging and enjoying sexual intercourse (DeMaris, 2000). Even though these warning signs may seem quite obvious to friends and family, many couples simply start to accept their relationship

inadequacies. That is, spouses in high conflict marriages assume that for most couples who are together for a long time, it is only to be expected that one or both spouses feel that a loss of excitement, intimacy and sex are natural and universal dilemmas experienced by many couples, whether conflict is regularly a part of their marriage or not (DeMaris, 2000).

Despite research explaining how conflict pushes couples further away, conflict for any couple can have a positive effect on the relationship and even bring couples closer together. Even for couples who report being in frequent conflict, this was not a strong predictor for marital dissolution. Poor or negative communication style was, however a predictor of marital dissolution (DeMaris, 2000). Couples who respected each other and resolved conflicts in a constructive, respectful and positive way showed higher levels of marital satisfaction and lower foreshadowing of eventual dissolution (DeMaris, 2000). The most important predictor marital dissolution was not the amount of conflict, but how both the husband and wife felt about their own marital satisfaction and how happy they were in the relationship. Having the perception of relationship instability was associated with breakup (DeMaris, 2000). For couples who were in high conflict with their spouse and admitted to feeling dissatisfied with their relationship, marriage was no longer a benefit to them and moving on without their partner may be an acceptable and positive choice of action.

It is important to note that high conflict marriages are far less common than marriages marked by positive and effective communication styles (Fincham, 2003). However, “about 80% of couples report having overt disagreements once a month or less” (Fincham, 2003, pg. 25). Conflict however, may not necessarily a destructive force in a marriage. In fact, many couples report that after a disagreement with their spouse, they feel closer and more secure in their relationship. Conflict allows both partners to be express their care and investment in the

relationship. Once couples stop arguing, this may be a sign that they no longer feel fighting for their relationship is a worthy cause (Fincham, 2003).

3.3 Neglect

Countless marriages involve one or both partners not providing enough love or attention to one another in either a physical, mental, or emotional way. It is likely that having a spouse who does not meet your desired needs can lead to unhappiness and dissatisfaction in a marriage. Neglect, in marriages, is another challenge to the idea that marriages are beneficial. Although neglect encompasses a wide variety of forms, many of them which go unreported, the World Health Organization released rates that spouses suffering from neglect at least once in their marriage could range from 20-50% (2002). This shocking number has spurred a serious and national health concern.

One popular research question involving relationships is how couples solve conflict. How do couples know when to give up and end a relationship and when and how do they alter the way they attack their problems? When couples are married they may respond to stressful situations differently than when they were just dating (Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982). This may be because of all the emotional investment, perhaps children and the vows they undertook. In marriages, couples may respond to conflict not by simply leaving the relationship, like they would when they were dating, but by becoming neglectful towards one another. Neglect is a passive form of abuse; it is the emotionally and physically withdrawing from a relationship whereas abuse and violence have to do with the active verbal or physical infliction of pain, matters that will be discussed later (Rusbult et al., 1982).

A decrease in marital satisfaction can quickly lead to couples becoming physically and emotionally withdrawn, which could grow into expressing a habitual routine of little love and affection (Rusbult et al., 1982). Neglect, then, is one way that couples can choose to respond to their dissatisfaction they are experiencing. Neglect can show itself in a relationship in a variety of ways, such as “ignoring the partner or spending less time together, refusing to discuss problems, treating the partner badly emotionally or physically, criticizing the partner for things unrelated to the real problem, “just letting things fall apart, and developing extra-relationship sexual involvements” (Hinde, 1997, pg. 176). This type of method is purely destructive and a passive way of handling a relationships problems if a couple has any intention of wanting to save their marriage.

In neglectful relationships, husbands and wives are commonly known to be critical of one another (Rusbult et al., 1982). A neglectful relationship is an indicator that one or both spouses are choosing to abandon their partner rather than to actively voice and work on their issues. Neglect means spouses opt to use their feelings of dissatisfaction in harmful forms of communication such as “expression of negative affect, hostility and belligerent complaints; negative attributions about partners’ communications; the enjoyment of fewer shared recreational activities and the greater likelihood of extramarital coitus” (Rusbult et al., 1982, pg. 1232). Once neglect falls into a relationship, couples are rarely saved from future divorce or separation, as it shows that one or both spouses are no longer invested in the longevity and maintenance of the relationship (Rusbult et al., 1982).

How happy couples are in the start of their relationships and how invested they are indicates how much they will decide to use constructive responses when their marital quality starts to decrease. These types of responses include, “discussing problems, compromising,

adopting an active problem-solving orientation, or simply waiting patiently for conditions to improve” (Rusbult et al., 1982, pg.1239). Couples who feel that their level of dissatisfaction is not worth trying to save their marriage show non-loving attention to their partner by using destructive patterns of behavior such as, “ignoring the partner, quietly allowing the relationship to decay, or ending the relationship” (Rusbult et al., 1982, pg. 1240).

Couples who do report the highest level of satisfaction in the beginning years of marriage, feel an emotional investment to one another and so often voice their feelings in order to communicate properly (Rusbult et al., 1982). They put forth more effort and steer away from neglectful communication patterns. These constructive couples are compared to other less satisfied couples who may become neglectful when faced with continued marital conflict. For couples who have been together for a long number of years, have split assets and even children will be more likely to remain loyal and try to work out their differences. This is compared to couples with minimal investment who may choose destructive responses as a way to communicate once their relationship decreases in satisfaction. These couples passively allow their relationship to die; they are losing interest but have yet to find a better alternative (Rusbult et al., 1982). It is these couples who we might say do not benefit from marriage and may be happier starting a new life on their own.

3.4 Abuse and Violence

Every year a highly unfortunate number of wives and husbands are killed by their spouses. In 1995, for example, “1,214 women were killed by their partners, whereas 458 men were killed by their partners”, and these rates have stayed consistent throughout the 21st century (DeMarsi, 2000, pg. 683). The 2010 National Domestic Violence Statistics report a shocking

number of “more than three women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends in this country every day” (Stingley, 2010). Violence also includes those incidences that did not lead to death but to considerable physical harm. In 1994, about “204,000 women and 39,000 men were treated in emergency rooms for injuries related to partner violence” (DeMarsi, 2000, pg. 683). Although the terms “violence” and “abuse” are thought of as interchangeable, there is now a general consensus that “violence” suggests physical force, whereas, “abuse” is used to comprise the physical or emotional harm that could be either violent or nonviolent (Pagelow, 1984).

Abuse and violence in a marital setting can obviously cause feelings of dissatisfaction, resentment, and unhappiness, which in turn can lead individuals to be deprived of the benefits of a happy marriage. Marital violence can easily destroy any happiness or satisfaction that was once present when the marriage began. Violence can stem from pathological jealousy, the seeking of power from one’s own insecurities and can lead to mental degradation and the controlling of one’s spouse in every minor detail (Pagelow, 1984). Even in marriages where abuse or violence only appeared once since they married, it can still have a long-term negative effect on the spouse, forever damaging the relationship and changing the way spouses view one another. Once a single act of indiscretion has occurred, the balance of power is shifted, the trust and openness between spouses is destroyed, and the equality is abandoned. Wives especially live in constant threat that keeps them from enjoying the better sides of their spouse and their relationship (Pagelow, 1984).

Assaults by marital spouses are still a big problem today. Interviews assessing marital violence found that 56% of husbands and wives are physically aggressive toward one another while having arguments (Frieze & Browne, 1989). Divorce records show that 37% of divorces were caused by physical abuse by the husbands (Frieze & Browne, 1989). One striking observation is that assaults done by marital partners seem to be related to increased injuries than

violence done by strangers. Although this is a scary realization, marriage for most couples, serves to be a source of emotional and physical strength, and a place to find safety, security and protection from the evils of the world.

Research provides us with several characteristics of violent marriage partners, that is, common patterns that appear to consistently show up among marriages exhibiting abuse. High alcohol use by the husband is a major correlate to violence in marriage (Frieze & Browne, 1989). A controlling style in a husband is another related factor. The majority of abusive husbands had themselves witnessed a great deal of violence and male domination in their own families growing up. They observed violence between their parents or care-givers and possibly adopted this way of behaving with their spouse later in life (Frieze & Browne, 1989). Other correlates to violent husbands include, “low income, low occupational status, low education, relationships characterized by assertiveness, frequency of verbal altercations and marital dissatisfaction, and religious incompatibility” (Frieze & Browne, 1989, pg 185).

Research shows that couples who are experiencing marital violence, compared to those in nonviolent marriages, are not surprisingly less likely to have affectionate behavior toward one another, less physical connection, less sex and less responsive behavior (Frieze & Browne, 1989). However, clinicians report that many battered women claim to love their spouse and value having a loving and affectionate husband as a priority in a marriage. One speculation of where these positive feelings toward their abusive husbands derives from when wives remembered the love and affection their husbands provided before the marriage became violent. Most battered women, between, 73-85 percent, did not experience physical assault until after they made a big commitment, such as marriage (Frieze & Browne, 1989). These women reported that in the beginning, they felt loved and were given attention that pleased them. However, once married,

their husband's behavior became increasingly controlling and possessive (Frieze & Browne, 1989).

Many married women suffer through forced rape from their husbands. These wives say they give in to sex out of fear of their husbands and not wanting to be beaten (Frieze & Browne, 1989). These women report a great deal of shame and embarrassment about their situation and even admit that their husbands have choked them until they lost unconsciousness over sexual wishes. Forced sexual intercourse obviously takes a toll on the marital satisfaction for women, especially, when "Over 40 percent also reported that sex was unpleasant for them because of being forced" (Frieze & Browne, 1989, pg.190). Evidence points that marital rape can be more damaging than any other type of assault or violence, and that it was more predictive of women wanting to leave their marriage than any other type of violence they endured (Frieze & Browne, 1989).

Violence in marriage can by no means be equally beneficial for both spouses when it is commonly termed as, "the stronger taking advantage of the weaker" (Frieze & Browne, 1989, pg.190). Research suggests that men who abuse are trying to make up for the inadequacies and low self esteem that they desire by seeking to take away their wives control in the house. Battering husbands often seek power and as such act in full management of the financial spending and of all the decisions in the house including their wives social network. They make decisions of where the couple goes and what activities they join in (Frieze & Browne, 1989). These marital abuse victims are a prime example of how not all marriages are beneficial. Many of these women suffer from sexual dysfunction and several different types of stress responses including Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and depression (Frieze & Browne, 1989).

3.5 Marriage under difficult or different circumstances (marrying when young, against parental wishes)

America is in the era where more men and women are waiting longer to marry, yet still a fairly large amount of individuals are choosing not to follow this norm. As our society continues to experience more individuals waiting longer to marry and cohabitation rates climb, we have focused our attention on why people are not marrying, and have overlooked the number of individuals choosing to still marry, and marry young, that is, between ages eighteen to twenty-three. According to the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, “25% of women and 16% of men marry before age 23” (Uecker & Stokes, 2008, pg. 835). What are the effects of marrying young? What are the underlying causes of marrying young? An especially interesting question is why these couples choose to marry when cohabitation and premarital sex have become increasingly common and acceptable in our society today (Uecker & Stokes, 2008).

U.S. Census Bureau data suggest found results that “19% of 20-24 year olds have married” (Uecker & Stokes, 2008, pg. 835). Moreover, “13% of men and 25% of women” in this age group have married (Uecker & Stokes, 2008, pg. 835). Marrying young presents a number of challenges: individuals may not fully know themselves or their partners and this lack of self knowledge may lead to a failed marriage (Uecker & Stokes, 2008). Many young marriages often occur because of an unplanned pregnancy, and the couple wants to do the right thing for their unborn baby. In fact, adolescent pregnancies are one of the most probable explanations for why young couples decide to wed. Having a child only heightens their risk of breakup as becoming a parent causes them to enter forced parental roles where they often have to abandon their journey into identity exploration and formation. This can be highly unfortunate, because although they

share a child together, they often lack true feelings of love or lack a sense of long-term commitment (Burchinal, 1965).

Individuals who marry young have a number of common characteristics. As Uecker and Stokes explain, young married couples are more likely to be from “disadvantaged families, from conservative Protestant or Mormon families, to value their religious faith more highly, to have a high-school diploma but a lower educational trajectory, and to cohabit before marriage” (2008, pg. 835).

The data also suggests that more women choosing to marry young compared to men (Uecker & Stokes, 2008). One other reason for these patterns is that young adults who have educated parents and a family of higher SES, will be more likely to aspire for a higher education themselves, and therefore, less likely to marry before age twenty-three. Finally, those who live in the southern parts of the U.S. and in nonmetropolitan areas are shown to marry younger than those who do not (Uecker & Stokes, 2008).

The quality of the relationships between parents and their adolescent children also has been shown to have an impact on whether adolescents marry early in the 18-24 year range (Uecker & Stokes, 2008). Those adolescents who admit to having an unsatisfactory relationship with their parents are the ones engaging in more adolescent marriages and childbirth. These adolescents find themselves to be more ready to accept early adult roles and responsibilities and are eager to transition into adulthood at a faster rate. Parents who frequently punished their adolescent was another cause for them to drop out of school and take on early role transitions into adulthood (Uecker & Stokes, 2008).

These characteristics of young marriages point to an elevated risk for marital instability (Delissovoy & Hitchcock, 1965). Many scholars would argue that very young couples seem to

set themselves up for a soon-to-be failed marriage. As if having a child is not stressful enough, many young individuals also choose to forgo future educational attainment. This forgoing only leads to later financial strain that spills into their marriage as teens and young adults have a hard time finding adequate salaries on their high school degrees. One such study by Delissovoy and Hitchcock (1965) found that once married, nearly 9 of out 10 women did not complete high school, compared to three out of ten men. These data offers serious concern for how early marriage can influence an adolescent to quit school, which may increase the risk of a dissatisfying marriage down the road (Delissovoy & Hitchcock, 1965)

Those who marry young may become quickly dissatisfied in their relationship as they and their spouse continue to grow and mature into two different people, heading in two different directions. Their romantic and naive goals for their marriage may easily be second guessed once enough time goes by and reality of their hardships set in. Early romantic relationships usually do not turn out to be the most long-lasting relationships individuals have, because of their premature understanding they have of themselves and their partner (Booth & Edwards, 1985).

Given the above patterns, some argue that marriage may not be beneficial for those who marry early. Adolescent marriages are believed to bring a variety of stressors due to the abrupt shift in adult responsibilities, including supporting themselves, their spouse and often a newborn at an early age (Booth & Edwards, 1985). The fact that many young marriages decide to start a family early only increases the probability of higher levels of stress and the likelihood that the relationship will fumble. It is not solely scholars that assume young marriages result in marital dissatisfaction, many young couples themselves state that their relationship suffered once married. Failed adolescent marriages revolve around the idea that early marriages “may disrupt the ability of adolescents to resolve crises of intimacy and identity formation and maintenance of

intimate relationships” (Teti & Lamb, 1989, pg. 209). Adolescents may not have completely formed the social-cognitive skills necessary in order to maintain romantic relationships that prove to be long lasting and beneficial to both spouses (Booth & Edwards, 1985).

Researchers argue that the immature nature of adolescents is thought to impact the marital relationship by the fact that they are also much more likely to choose inappropriate mates. Furthermore, some adolescents are so eager to escape their home that they underestimate all of the responsibilities involved in starting a family of their own (Booth & Edwards, 1985).

Many researchers have found that the age of one’s first marriage is a strong predictor of later divorce and marital instability (Lee, 1977). Lee further suggests that, adolescents set themselves up for divorce because they have had little experience in learning how to take care of a mate. Additionally, married adolescents have had little time to learn from observation and experience to properly know and understand the tasks involved in becoming married and underestimate the roles, responsibilities and duties as a husband or wife (Lee, 1977). In other words, those who marry early do not possess adequate role models, and this only reflects in the adolescent’s inability to support their husband or wife and their own ability to fulfill their performance as a spouse. This poor role performance is strongly linked to young marriage instability (Lee, 1977).

The exchange theory offers two additional explanations for why young marriages are doomed to fail. First, many adolescents are aware that in the event of a divorce, their chances of remarrying are quite high (Booth & Edwards, 1985). Thus, adolescents may choose to divorce upon slight dissatisfaction in their marriage because they do not want to stay in an unhappy marriage when they have endless options still readily available to them. In fact, young married couples are still surrounded by a variety of other young, single, attractive individuals that could

potentially serve as distractions and temptations against both the husband and wife, perhaps causing thoughts of divorce early on (Booth & Edwards, 1985). However, if a married adolescent does not feel as though they have other options available to them, feel as though they could emotionally handle the breakup of a marriage, or think they will be able to survive financially on their own, and then they will opt to stay in an unhappy marriage (Booth & Edwards, 1985).

It may not be surprising then that findings about marital instability show that those who marry young, that is, in their early 20s, have the highest level of marital dissatisfaction (Booth & Edwards, 1985). For couples who marry early, there were several factors that led to their marital dissatisfaction, however, the highest ranked on surveys was the spouse's lack of faithfulness to their partner. Young couples reported that their most often problem revolved around having sex with others and jealousy involved. Arguments or discussions involving this topic led to a domineering style of communication and a refusal to talk, leading to further marital instability. Although poor money management and aspects of identity development were shown to be important, these factors have been shown to be secondary factors to sexual exclusivity (Booth & Edwards, 1985). Other factors included, "the amount of understanding received, extent of agreement about things, and companionship (someone to do things with)" (Booth & Edwards, 1985, pg.72). Booth and Edwards show how young couples are often simply inapt to provide unconditional and eternal love and care for another. There are reasonably added stresses on young couples that tear couples apart, which older couples seem to be protected against simply by having greater self-knowledge, financial stability, and sexual exclusivity.

Another factor that could lead to adolescents suffering from a dissatisfactory marriage would be the absence of support coming from close friends and family, that is, teenage marriages

may be completely devoid of parental approval (Booth & Edwards, 1985). Those who marry young, are more likely to be facing some resentment, anger, or upsetment from their parents who may not agree or accept the marriage. This is but another factor as to why marrying young is a difficult circumstance. If one's parents are unaccepting of the marriage, they would be less likely to offer financial support, and be less likely to welcome the other spouse into their home which could put a strain on the parent-child relationship, as well as the marital relationship. In such a case, interactions between the adolescent and their parents as well as each spouse's in-laws may be dismal or even nonexistent. Friends of both the young husband and wife who also do not support the union could be another added stress on the already fragile marriage. All of these factors could be a constant pressure on the young couple, actively and regularly "pulling" the couple further and further away from each other (Booth & Edwards, 1985).

Marriage critics would use young marriages as an argument to explain how not all marriages are beneficial and yield happy and healthy outcomes. Their identity immaturity, lack of financial stability and inability to love another more than themselves, have caused many of these first time love marriages to quickly end in disappointment. Yet it is important to recognize that these reasons for why young marriages fail do not have to do with marriage itself, but with the characteristics and qualities of a young adult. Marriage does offer multiple benefits to those ready to reap its benefits, but before committing yourself, you have to know yourself and the one you are promising yourself to.

3.6 Gender differences in marriage benefits

Some feminists question whether men and women are receiving equal advantages in marriage. They argue that troubled marriages give men many advantages over women. Although

many of these unequal rights seem to have disappeared, some feminists still strongly believe these injustices are still evident of heterosexual marriages today (Josephson, 2005). History has taught us that women were once seen as male's property, men had full control of their wives sexually and women handed over their rights as citizens to their husbands. Feminists today believe that some residue of this authoritative style of marriage is still intact (Josephson, 2005).

For example, Josephson states that, "despite legal and social changes to the institution, marriage is still a central instrument in the denial of women's status as full citizens" (Josephson, 2005, pg 274). Furthermore, feminists note that married women still receive lower job pay, among other things, and hence are still somewhat dependent on their husbands for economic support. One piece of evidence that is consistent with this analysis is that wives are less satisfied than husbands with their marriage. Feminists argue that the reason for such gender differences in satisfaction is that men receive greater advantages from marriage. Feminists point to the unequal division of household work as one possible reason for unequal happiness between husbands and wives (Josephson, 2005).

With women working in longer hours in the paid work force compared to earlier years, the added burden of maintaining a house has caused many women to find dissatisfaction in their marriage, to become more depressed, and to be more stressed (Josephson, 2005). To support the feminists' argument, studies have shown that husbands do, at most, 35 percent of the household chores. This shows how men still believe in the idea that women are the ones who should be primarily responsible for the upkeep of the house and have the burden of managing the daily chores and tasks involved. Research also shows that even men who have more egalitarian beliefs about household chores, do less labor around the house than their wives. Although change has

occurred over the years, there is still a distinct and considerable difference between the roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives (Josephson, 2005).

The caption of an article in the *USA Today*, of October 11, 1993 read, “Guys Wed for Better; Wives for Worse.” The article described how men get more out of a marriage, have greater benefits than women in terms of psychological and mental health, as well as fewer household responsibilities. Do these arguments have any truth to them? There have been numerous studies to date that have shown how more positive effects for husbands than for wives (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). This finding has gone against what many people would instinctually otherwise suggest, since we usually think of men viewing being married to being “tied down” or “trapped.” In previous years, we saw marriage as being a burden for men; something that they really did not want to engage in yet felt was the appropriate social thing to do. However, the reality is that men experience a wide range of benefits from marriage (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). There have been arguments made suggesting that in today’s culture, a gender role reversal has happened, in that married women now are the ones, not men, who are losing their sense of self (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). One way this has happened is through women working just as much as men, yet they are still responsible for the continued upkeep of the household chores, family care meeting their husband’s needs. Women are spending less time focusing on their needs and interests for the sake of their career, the household, and providing for her husband and children. Her demanding schedule is associated with the gradual loss of self that women feel today (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

To use a quote from Waite and Gallagher, “women are described as casualties of a marital subculture that crushed their emerging identities” (2000, pg 161). It has been noted that since marriage seems to benefit men more, the divorce culture has benefits geared more to the

female population. Feminists argue that for many women, once divorced, they are released from the burden of household chores, free from having to make a man happy, and be able to take back her freedom and independence. Marriage therefore, in many people's beliefs, brings about subordination for women, and it is in divorce, that they find liberation (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Jesse Bernard, wrote a book on the gender differences in marriage, describing marriage as "his" marriage and "her" marriage. She states that, "for men, marriage brings health, power, and satisfaction. For women, marriage brings stress, dissatisfaction and loss of self" (Bernard, as cited in Waite and Gallagher, 2000, pg. 162). Bernard took a very negative view on the physical and psychological health of married women, stating her belief that wives had poor emotional health and were many times anxious, depressed and psychologically distressed. She believes that "for women, marriage is a kind of psychological torture, gradually debilitating their emotional and mental health" (Bernard, as cited in Waite and Gallagher, 2000, pg. 162). One final thought she stated was that "a happy housewife must be a sick woman" (Bernard, as cited in Waite and Gallagher, 2000, pg. 162). Bernard believed a traditional marriage put many added stresses on the women to constantly make her husband happy and to perform her household duties that she becomes overwhelmed with distress and sadness (2000).

Certainly there is some evidence showing women receive less benefits compared to men in marriage, but this is not the whole story. In response to Bernard's arguments, Waite and Gallagher set out to investigate if "his" and "her" marriages were really different (2000). Waite and Gallagher, as well as other researchers believe that the majority of men and women in marriage are equally happy and fulfilled in their relationship. Although husbands and wives may receive different kinds of benefits from marriage, both are satisfied and experience a high level of marriage quality. Waite and Gallagher conclude, "marriage does not boost men's egos while

deforming women's souls, instead, both men and women are psychologically healthier when married" (2000, pg.168). Not only do both men and women report equal amounts of happiness in their marriage, but married individuals report a greater level of happiness than their single counterparts. "His" marriage and "her" marriage have been found to be more similar than different after all. In recent surveys, both men and women expressed high amounts of satisfaction in their marriages. One survey found by Waite and Gallagher show that "sixty-one percent of husbands and 59 percent of wives say their marriage is very happy, 36 percent of husbands and wives call their marriage "pretty happy" and just 2 percent of men and 4 percent of women report "not too happy" as a measure of their marital satisfaction" (2000, pg.168).

More detailed measures on marital happiness were described by Scott Stanley and Howard Markman who also found similar positive responses for husbands and wives. The two psychologists developed a study to examine the levels of satisfaction, dedication, friendship, fun and sensuality found within marriage (Stanley & Markman, 1997). They also created measures to assess various "danger signs," or negative patterns of interactions such as loneliness and thoughts of divorce. Again, results showed that husbands and wives reported similar levels of marital happiness and each individual showed little signs of danger. The only difference that was found between the genders was that men were found to be more likely to withdraw when conflict arose (Stanley & Markman, 1997 pg. 22).

Although society makes it seem as if women spend more time tending to the relationship and investing more time in working at it, both men and women reported similar levels of commitment to one another. They each scored high on the personal dedication measure, showing how each spouse has the commitment and loyalty to want to maintain and improve the overall

quality of their relationship; they are both willing to make sacrifices for the relationship, invest in it and strive to give what they can to support one another (Stanley & Markman, 1997).

What about gender differences in sex, safety, money, long life and family satisfaction? Many psychologists have investigated how husbands and wives evaluated their marriages based on these dimensions. The research was clear in showing that both men and women have health benefits when married, although men seemed to show some advantages in these areas (Stanley & Markman, 1997; Ross, Mirowsky & Goldsteen, 1990). As stated by the 2010 National Marriage Week USA, remaining unmarried can be hazardous to your health and physical well-being, as studies show that “compared to married people, the nonmarried have higher rates of mortality than the married: about 50 percent higher among women and 250 percent higher among men” (Ross et al., 1990, pg. 1061). Results of this finding showed how both men and women, but especially men seem to need marriage if they want to lead a longer, healthier life.

With regard to finances, both genders benefit (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Although reasons for this were discussed in the previous sections, greater financial stability is established as dual earning incomes come into a married household creating greater saving responsibilities and more careful spending. Furthermore, married men have higher wages compared to single men and so wives of these men therefore benefit from the increased salary. Therefore, women gain a greater financial deal than their husbands do (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

With regard to sex and sexual satisfaction, a common stereotypical belief would be to assume that men experience greater sexual advantages, yet the research points in the opposing direction, suggesting that women are the ones that gain greater sexual benefits (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Despite women reporting a slightly higher sexual satisfaction in marriage, both couples are more fulfilled and have greater satisfaction having sexual relations with a spouse

compared to their single counterparts. Although I mentioned earlier about abusive relationships, wives are still better protected from sexual abuse in marriages than if they were to be single or cohabitating (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Moving onto health benefits, men win this category, although, both genders do gain greater health benefits. “Both men and women are safer, more sexually satisfied and wealthier, if married, but women benefit more on sexual satisfaction, financial well-being, and protection from domestic violence and they benefit about equally on emotional well-being” (Waite & Gallagher, 2000, pg. 170). Overall, the overall benefits are about equal for married men and women, even though some may have a slight advantage over the other. Waite and Gallagher, in their extensive research have found that Bernard’s conclusions, that only men benefited from marriage was not true. Waite and Gallagher concluded that “on average, his marriage and her marriage are equally committed, equally happy and equally psychologically healthy” (Waite & Gallagher, 2000, pg. 173).

3.7 Social class differences in positive effects

Research has found a link between social class and positive effects of marriage (Amato & Previti, 2003). Marital stability has been directly linked to the couple’s income, and strongly related to their education, occupation and social class. Income, as discussed later, is a more prominent factor in marital quality. In this section I will discuss research that shows those in higher socioeconomic statuses (SES) have higher marital satisfaction compared to lower SES couples. Social class differences in positive effects of marriage is another example that marriage critics use to support the idea that marriage may not be beneficial to everyone. Income and assets are major contributors to long-lasting, more durable relationships. Although lower SES couples

are the focus for dissatisfied relationships, I will also discuss how the highest SES couples can have some harmful effects on their relationships as well (Rusbult, C, Zembrodt, I., & Gunn, L., 1982).

Researchers are able to assess how wives and husbands rate their marriage in terms of their happiness and satisfaction level by using the Index of Marital Satisfaction (Renne, 1970). Items in the index ask questions like, “Do you ever regret your marriage,” “All in all, how happy has your marriage been for you,” “Does your husband (wife) give you as much understanding as you need?” and “Has your marriage turned out to be better or worse than you expected?” (Renne, 1970, pg 56). Using this index, researchers find that black couples show greater amounts of marital dissatisfaction than white couples. One reason is considered to be due to differences in socioeconomic status between Blacks and Whites. Blacks tend to be less well educated, in lower-prestige occupations, and have lower incomes compared to Whites. This can be very unfortunate for black couples as financial stability is a major correlate to marital quality and satisfaction, thus explaining why Blacks are more likely than Whites to express dissatisfaction in their marriages (Renne, 1970). Along the same lines, blue-collar workers, especially those in unskilled labor, have a higher level of marital dissatisfaction than those with more prestigious occupations (Renne, 1970). The basic conclusion is that income is an important factor in how couples rate their marital satisfaction and higher incomes show a more positive correlation to marital quality. As Renne states, “Income is more closely related to marital dissatisfaction than is either education or occupation, probably because it has an independent and very concrete impact on a couple’s daily life” (1970, pg. 61).

Men with higher levels of education, usually seek out and marry women of the same educational experience. It is argued that couples who are highly educated are able to handle

conflict in more constructive ways, and are better equipped to “work out their differences” than lower educated couples (Cutright, 1971). As a result, men with more education have greater marital stability (Cutright, 1971). Likewise, couples with less educational attainment are shown to be at risk for marital instability. Couples with lower educational attainment often lack the knowledge and skills taught to handle positive and healthy ways of communicating with their spouse (Amato & Previti, 2003).

Not all research is consistent, however. A study by Cutright (1971) showed no strong link between education and marital dissatisfaction. For example, “74 percent of the white males with eight or fewer years of education were still married to their first spouse” (pg.293). Among nonwhite males, similar results were found.

Unlike education level differences, income has a consistent effect on marriage (Amato & Previti, 2003). Marital stability, for both whites and nonwhites, increases as income increases. These results on education and income go back to the belief mentioned earlier that income is the strongest predictor of marital stability and that education has only an indirect relationship to one’s salary. The reason that income is associated with marital stability is that economic struggles cause couples to be less physically and emotionally supportive to one another, and to become more bitter, irritable or frustrated. Marriages marked by economic stress can lead to decreases in physical, mental and emotional well-being, and cause them to be less happy and satisfied in their marriage (Amato & Previti, 2003).

Couples who are experiencing financial strain and economic deprivation are thought to have lower satisfaction in their marriages for the simple reason that it is hard to live without an adequate amount of finances to pay for all necessary items (Renne, 1970). An insufficient amount of income may also represent a husband’s lack of responsibility in providing for his

family as the breadwinner (Renne, 1970). I mentioned earlier that income plays a larger role in adding strain on the relationship compared to education or occupation, and this is explained by two different beliefs, the first being consumption. As stated by Cutright, “consumption is a daily activity, and it provides the wife with a constant empirical monitoring of how well her husband is doing in his role as breadwinner” (1971, pg. 296). With the husband being able to adequately provide for the family, the wife not only feels competent of her own abilities in taking care of the home but she maintains a positive view of her husband linked to a steady marital satisfaction. The husband, likewise, sees himself as a sufficient provider and they both consequently have a positive view of their marriage (Cutright, 1971).

The second reason comes from the fact that higher earning marriages are known to be more stable because of this successful role performance that the wife and husband know of themselves and each other. These high income couples are shown to have more mutual respect and affection towards one another than low income couples. This positive evaluation of one another reinforces feelings of happiness and satisfaction between them. High income means that the couple will be able to increase their assets together; they will be able to save more, have bigger investments and be able to combine money in order to buy the luxuries, such as cars and homes they desire (Cutright, 1971).

Of course, some high social class couples may possess qualities that put them at risk for divorce, although they are still much less divorce prone than low social class couples (Amato & Previti, 2003). Those who are well-educated may expect, or demand, certain expectations from their spouse, and if their needs are not met, they may be quick to look at divorce for a solution. These high social class individuals hold high standards in their marriage, and expect their spouse to be their unconditional supporter, companion and someone that gives them everything they

want, physically, emotionally and mentally. Therefore, having high standards may prone them to be unwilling to stay with a spouse that does not satisfied and continually meet these needs (Amato & Previti, 2003).

Couples with varying levels of social class report different problems in their marriages that caused dissatisfaction, and even divorce. Couples with higher social class had more frequent relationship problems dealing with “lack of communication, changes in interests or values, incompatibility, and their (ex) spouses self centeredness” (Amato & Previti, 2003, pg. 606). Low social class couples reported a different set of problems. These couples tended to complain more about “physical abuse, going out with the boys/girls, neglect of household duties, gambling, criminal activities, financial problems, and employment problems” (Amato & Previti, 2003, pg. 606). In addition, differences lie in the fact that low social class couples who eventually divorced, reported more about financial problems, drinking and abuse whereas high social class couples who divorced reported their relationship problems revolved around a lack of love and feeling like their spouse demanded too much of them (Amato & Previti, 2003). Evidence from these couples shows us that as couples increase in their social class, their relationship problems are more likely to develop out of changes in values and personality clashes than from material possessions and money, factors that harm lower social class couples (Amato & Previti, 2003).

Once married, couples are not automatically blessed with eternal happiness and bliss. Sometimes, people change or one’s social class changes, and the whole dynamic of the relationship alters. Research on social class shows us that a change in social class could promote greater marital satisfaction, or it could cause stress and added pressure on the couple. It would seem that marriage critics have a valid argument; social class, which depends a great deal on finances, can serve as a powerful detriment of marital satisfaction (Amato & Previti, 2003).

3.8 Personality traits-related to divorce

Amato (2000), describes how many poorly adjusted people not only are more likely to get divorced, but they have personality and character flaws that hinder them from developing and keeping a happy and healthy marital relationship. More specifically, “certain individuals possess problematic personal and social characteristics that not only predispose them to divorce, but also lead them to score low on indicators of well-being after the marriage ends” (Amato, 2000, pg.1273). These individuals show symptoms of adjustment problems long before their marriage may have even begun, yet marriage enables the other spouse to become much more aware of their personality and character flaws. There is evidence that negative personality traits that people bring into their marriage hinders the couple from building a closer, more loving relationship. Marriage critic’s use view negative personality traits as further support on their belief that not all marriages are beneficial. In this section I will review the evidence for the link between personality traits and marital quality.

There are a variety of personality flaws that people possess that have been shown to cause once happy couples to end in a divorce. Some of these personality risk factors that lead to divorce include “antisocial personality traits, depression, and a general history of psychological problems” (Amato, 2004, pg.1273). Remarriages following divorce is a common phenomenon in many people’s lives, yet are they of the same quality relationship as first time marriages? Amato looked at how for some individuals, their divorce-stress-adjustment problem, may be a major facilitator in a decrease in marital satisfaction and overall quality of their next relationship. In other words, Amato considered how for some individuals who divorce for the first time, they may continue to carry over their negative feelings of anger, confusion, sadness and other emotions into their next marriage, thus increasing the likelihood they contribute to another failed

marriage as well. Furthermore, a parent's style of discipline and the level of dysfunction in one's family of origin may have a causal relation to how children maintain these dysfunctional patterns of interaction. Often individuals carry their family dysfunctions into their future romantic relationships in which their marriages are consequently affected (Amato, 2004).

Longitudinal studies have been conducted to examine how much happiness and satisfaction is still apart of married couples lives after the years they wed (Newton & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1995). One study, comprised of 53 newlywed couples who were in their first marriage with no children, were given interviews in order to assess spouse's level of marital quality. These reports were assessed 5 months into their marriage, then again every year. We know from research on the advantages of marriage, that being married can bring about positive benefits in one's emotional, financial, sexual, mental and physical health. Having a close companion to share your life with has numerous health advantages and leads to a greater well-being. Yet, some kinds of relationships can also hinder one's well-being if the relationship suffers in quality. This study was particularly interested in how an individual who has the personality trait of being hostile can affect the marriage relationship. In this case, researchers labeled a hostile personality as being marked by "cynical and mistrustful attitudes and a propensity to experience anger and to act aggressively" (Newton & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1995, pg. 602) Having a hostile personality, seen more commonly in men, is one negative personality trait that substantially and consistently affects a marital happiness (Newton & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1995).

Learning about how personalities affect a marriage is important to study since one's marital satisfaction influences and directly affects each spouse's well-being and how mentally and physically healthy they are. Marriages where one spouse has a hostile personality can mean that the couple experiences a high number of conflictive interactions that serve a large role in

declining satisfaction in the relationship (Newton & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1995). Reports about when conflict in marriage is most prevalent suggest that “significant and negative, associations between marital quality and conflictive interactions begin to emerge approximately 1 to 2 years into marriage and continue to increase in magnitude over time, at least through the first 5 years of marriage” (Newton & Keicolt-Glaser, 1995, pg. 603). This statistic means that newlyweds especially have to handle beginning conflict and disagreements that come with starting a new life with someone. A hostile personality may be interfering with positive and healthy communication in a marriage as this means one or both spouses bring a cynical, antagonistic and mistrustful mindset to the relationship that continually erodes happiness (Newton & Keicolt-Glaser, 1995).

Through using a series of observational studies of marital interactions, research shows that hostility is positively and significantly associated with exhibiting hostile behaviors and cognitions. Examples of these can occur when a spouse frequently blames the other and uses cynical interactions when talking to their spouse. This style of communication causes the couple, especially the wives, to report their marriage as low quality. Conclusions that we can make from this study is that in the early years of marriage, a spouse’s hostile personality and behaviors are positively correlated with a decreases in their own, and their spouses overall marriage satisfaction (Newton & Keicolt-Glaser, 1995).

Through further observational and self-report analysis, we find that there are other known “negative” personality characteristics, similar to hostility, which erode satisfaction in a marriage. Spouses who by their words and actions exude negative personality traits such as criticism and hostility have less satisfying marriages (Newton & Keicolt-Glaser, 1995). Having a spouse who is also mistrustful and suspicious of others can make them prone to be distrusting of their spouse and exhibit other negative behaviors, such as conflict and anger, deteriorating from the marital

quality. Wives of husbands who have these negative personality traits report that their husbands frequently blame them when things do not go right in their household and state this is a major cause for the diminishing of their happiness. Thus, the deterioration of the marital quality is thought to be a direct link to the negative cognitions and behaviors that are associated with a spouse's hostile or angry traits. These negative attributes can be related to the one's downgrade of physical well-being, because most spouses, especially women, are sensitive to their husband's hostility (Newton & Keicolt-Glaser, 1995).

Just as hostile personalities are believed to cause a deterioration of marital happiness, individuals marked with Type A personalities also are thought to contribute to a marital quality decrease (Burke, Weir, & DuWors, 1979). Type A personality traits are characterized by having a "highly competitive achievement orientation; a constant sense of time urgency; an unrelenting drive; polyphasic thinking; hurried and explosive speech patterns; and an aggressive, restless, and impatient manner" (Burke, Weir, & DuWors, 1979, pg.57). Type A individuals often times neglect their family and home life in order to advance in their work careers. These individuals who put countless hours into work choose to stay late in the office trying to overcome deadline pressures and work overload, and therefore, their involvement and preoccupation with their work usually means that they are neglecting precious time with their loved ones. They usually bring their work home with them and so they mix work and family life, where neither one has their full attention. Furthermore, they may be so exhausted from their overworked day that they come home and want be alone to relax or jump right into bed, unable to give attention to their families. Type A personalities set high standards for themselves and are constantly pushing themselves to work harder. They are easily frustrated and irritable with the work efforts of others, often including their spouses. The dedication and preoccupation these individuals have regarding their

work in both their physical and mental capacities raises important questions as to how their personal and home lives are being affected (Burke, Weir, & DuWors, 1979).

Research examining how Type A personalities affects their home life found that the “overlap and interaction between work roles and family roles presents compelling evidence that excessive involvement of men in demanding work roles can result in the alienation of the individual from his/her spouse and children, and that such excessive involvement places greater pressures on the family unit” (Burke, Weir, & DuWors, 1979, pg.58). Type A personality’s carry with them the ability to create stressful environments for themselves and their families. If these individuals are unable to separate work from family life, extra unnecessary stress is going to be placed on the family.

Through these harmful characteristics, it is common for marriages with a spouse who has a type A personalities to report less marital satisfaction. They also show a decrease in well-being and admit that their marriage relationship has a constant strain on it. One study, comprised of 85 senior administrators, ages 25-60, who worked in a correctional institution in a Canadian province, were further studied to test this hypothesis (Burke, Weir & DuWors, 1979). Each of these men responded to a Type A measure survey and another questionnaire was sent home to their wives to do separately from their husbands. The scale was to assess how individuals ranked themselves on the areas that involved “striving, persistence, competitive orientation, range of activities, positive attitudes toward pressure, environmental overburdening, sense of time urgency, leadership, and history of past achievement” (Burke et al., pg.59). The wives were asked questions that related to how satisfied they were with their relationship and how they ranked their well-being in their marriage. Wives questions were about assessing how much their husbands displayed love and affection to them, how much they laughed and joked together, and

how much their husbands came home irritable and were not emotionally or physically loving towards them. Results showed that wives did have “fewer positive or pleasurable marital interactions, more negative marital interactions or disagreements, less marital satisfaction and lower global or overall marital satisfaction” (Burke, Weir, & DuWors, 1979, pg.62). One main finding is that the wives reported greater type A personality traits in their husbands than their husbands reported in themselves. This could mean that husbands were not paying attention to the degree that their wives were struggling with their relationship, or that husbands were unaware of how sensitive their wives were to their stressful day of work and to how they greeted their wives and showed attention to them. Likewise, wives reported that their husband’s job had a negative impact on their children’s lives and the overall home environment (Burke, Weir, & DuWors, 1979).

Certain emotions and feelings were found to be prevalent among wives of husbands with Type A personalities, including feelings of “depression and worthlessness, of anxiety and tension, and of guilt and isolation” (Burke, Weir, & DuWors, 1979, pg.62). Many wives overall felt that they were not as important to their husbands as they would like to be, they felt they were a lower priority to him, with work and career topping the list (Burke, Weir, & DuWors, 1979). Related to health behaviors, the higher the type A personality of the husband, the greater the risk that the wife began smoking. Wives of these type A husbands reported having significantly less friends and social networks that they could rely on for support, and so many wives also found no way to handle their stress appropriately. Consequently, these wives often dealt with their feelings by shouting in anger or rage outbursts or with spiritual responses such as prayer (Burke, Weir, & DuWors, 1979).

The one personality trait that has been linked to the most unstable marriages is neuroticism. With interpersonal problems occurring in the relationship, spouses often lack basic social skills and are more likely to “react to and reciprocate the negative behavior of the partner” (Kelly & Conley, 1987, pg.27). Couples in distress display more coercive control techniques and also frequently misinterpreted, to a negative degree, the meaning of their spouse’s words and actions. Couples with personalities marked with emotional instability and irritability, before their marriage began, were predictors of a low marriage adjustment (Kelly & Conley, 1987). Likewise, aggressive or domineering personality characteristics, have been linked to later marital dissatisfaction (Kelly & Conley, 1987).

How compatible married couples are in their intrapersonal and interpersonal characteristics can influence marital quality. It has been said that the “personality characteristics of the two marriage partners make the match stable and mutually satisfying or unstable and fraught with discontent” (Kelly & Conley, 1987, pg.27). Some researchers strongly believe that personality compatibility is the strongest predictor of marital bliss. Although many individuals may suggest financial struggles are a number one problem for couples, these researchers believe that low financial income is only a problem within marriage if one or both couple’s possess a negative personality, or they have conflicting personalities, but it is not finances itself (Kelly & Conley, 1987).

For individuals who display certain types of personalities, marriage does not appear to be equally beneficial for their well-being and happiness. Research tells us about the personality qualities of individuals that may deter from the satisfaction and happiness in a marriage. With the previous sections highlighting ways critics believe marriage may not be universally beneficial, perhaps it can also be argued that marriage does not automatically make couples happy, but it is

possible that the reverse is true, happy people are just more prone to marry. This is a debate that will be discussed in the next section.

B. Selection argument: marriage does not make people happy; happy people get married.

Most of research thus far has depicted marriage as an institution that brings couples many advantages compared to single. Yet, is it possible marriage may not be causing these advantages but rather, the reverse: happy and healthy people are much more likely to marry in the first place? This is a key debate in studying about the effects of marriage. Although most researchers in this field do not dismiss the idea that marriage serves as a benefactor for increased healthy and well-being, it would be equally important to study individuals as they go into and out of the married state, to see if marriage itself is the cause of better health and better living (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). As Waite & Gallagher describe,

“Perhaps the reason the divorced are sicker and die younger is that marriages are more likely to crumble from the stress and strain of living with illness. Perhaps women simply dump men who continue to engage in risky “bachelor” behaviors, such as drinking and driving, after they have tied the knot. Perhaps men and women who moan about minor aches and pains are simply less desirable partners, less able to attract and keep mates?” (2000, pg.51).

Waite and Gallagher review the evidence for marriage as a cause of the observed benefits and conclude that marriage is the reason for couples leading happier and healthier lives. We know for example, that married people have lower death rates, yet even those who were sick as they entered marriage lived longer compared to healthy singles (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Furthermore, we know that marriage is not selective to healthy individuals, since men in poor

health actually tended to marry (or remarry) sooner than healthier men (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Most researchers in the field agree with Waite and Gallagher, that marriage has an intrinsic value associated with it that offers couples advantages, regardless of personality or health differences. Marriage serves as a “supervisor” and “protector” system by monitoring their spouses’ behavior (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). One aspect of this definition means that marriage serves as a buffer against many daily stressors and health issues. This also helps to explain why married men engage in less risky or unhealthy behaviors such as alcohol overdose or suicide (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Marriage helps ward individuals against engaging in risky behaviors, it helps turn spouses into mature, responsible adults while simultaneously causing them to be happier and healthier (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Many married individuals themselves report that marriage gives them something that they cannot get anywhere else, and that it truly does make them happier. These people believe that having someone who will love them in all the best and worst days, having someone they can depend on and share their life with, their deepest thoughts and feelings, is a kind of intimacy that is distinct from other relationships. This is because it offers them a rare happiness, both physically and emotionally, something found only in marriage (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Marks and Lambert (2004) were two researchers who set out to find out if marriage really does bring about happiness by studying couples longitudinally as they move in and out of marriage. Some remarried, some stayed married, and some divorced and stayed single. Marks and Lambert tracked their psychological health and well-being over the years through a measure of eleven separate dimensions, ranging from depression, happiness with life in general, self-esteem, hostility (feeling angry, irritable, or likely to argue), autonomy, positive relations with

others environmental mastery (being able to meet the demands of everyday life) and personal growth to test their level of learning, changing and growing. Marks and Lambert (2004) found that marriage brought about a substantial and consistent amount of greater mental and emotional health benefits. Conversely, results showed how those who got divorced or separated suffered “substantial deterioration in mental and emotional well-being, including increased in depression and declines in reported happiness, compared to the married” (Marks, & Lambert, 2004, as cited in Waite and Gallagher, 2000 pg.70). This was the case even after the level of mental health and happiness was taken into account at the beginning of the study. Those who got divorced or separated also showed less purpose in life, less positive relations with others and less self-acceptance than those married. What Marks and Lambert concluded was that the act of getting married brought about greater happiness in people and getting divorced brought about the opposite effects, causing people to experience a decrease in their health, life satisfaction and positive feelings of their sense of self (2004).

Other research supports similar findings to Marks and Lambert. Allan Horwitz and his team (1996) investigated the same question in, their book, *Becoming Married and Mental Health*. This was based on a seven year study where they observed changes in psychological well-being among adults. Most attention was paid to the changes in well-being when individuals got married or divorced. The focus was on the link between depression and alcohol use and marital status. Conclusions of the study found that marriage made a big difference on an individual’s happiness as well as their level of alcohol intake, regardless of their initial state before they married. Marriage meant less depression and fewer drinks (Horwitz et al., 1996). Even spouses who were depressed or drank heavily when single benefited from marriage. If and when couples divorced, depression levels rose and the amount of drinking intake increased. Results reaffirmed the idea

that marriage was not solely reserved for the “happy” and “emotionally stable” individual and does promote healthier living for all individuals (Horwitz et al., 1996).

Marriage is an institution that appeals and accepts all varieties of people. To the extent that a person varies on how happy or physically or mentally stable they are does not mean they are any more or less likely to wed. Research on individual rates of depression and drinking found that these two factors that a person may experience in their earlier life was not correlated to whether they were to get married in future years (Horwitz et al., 1996). In fact, individuals who were clinically depressed or heavily drank were getting married at the same rate as individuals who were not depressed or did not excessively drink (Horwitz et al., 1996).

In 2007, Frech and Williams found positive results between the transition to marriage and psychological well-being. The two investigators separated depressed individuals from the non-depressed to examine whether positive well-being effects depended on one’s depressive symptoms prior to marriage. Investigating depressed individuals in marriage is one key resource in showing how marriage brings with it a “ready-made” support system. They found that the individuals who felt somewhat depressed and emotionally unstable as they entered marriage gained greater emotional health benefits than those who were emotionally and mentally healthy (Frech & Williams, 2007). In other words, the psychological benefits for depressed individuals were reported higher than the non-depressed. We know that marriage means greater emotional support and opens up a larger social network of family and friends, something that depressed individuals may need more of. The result of this increased social support and constant care and companionship from one’s marriage spouse leads depressed individuals to receive greater emotional benefits compared to emotionally stable and happy individuals (Frech & Williams, 2007). In sum, this research shows that, regardless of one’s unhealthy living style or an

individual's level of depression or emotional health, marriage is correlated to spouses reporting an increase in happiness and greater health benefits.

Finally, in a study conducted by Stutzer and Frey (2005), individuals over a seventeen year period were examined to determine the relationship between marriage and one's well-being and happiness. Results showed that happy people did indeed opt to marry more than unhappy individuals. Although this may somewhat contradict the argument that marriage is not selective, they also found that even those who were less happy when they decided to wed, become happier people once married. The study also found evidence that sharing your life with someone else, the division of labor, and raising a family, positively affected one's life (Stutzer & Frey, 2005). The results of this study found that marriage provides a greater well-being for two primary reasons. The first reason has to do with the fact that marriage provides a source of added self-esteem and self-confidence. Also, marriage offers a supportive system in which couples share their life together, offer companionship and friendship and in doing so protect each other from loneliness, depression and other emotional disorders (Stutzer & Frey, 2005).

From the research thus far on marriage we can make simple statements about the advantages it brings to couples. First, marriage is an intrinsic good that offers a wide variety of benefits to couples. Marriage is an institution that enables people to become happier, healthier and more fulfilled people from the moment they wed. Those who marry are obtaining various advantages to personal well-being, granting them a longer and happier life. Marriage is an institution that provides benefits, indiscriminately to people's personalities and previous mental health. Once married, individuals are better off (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

4. Cohabitation vs. Marriage: Are They Similar?

There have been two opposing perspectives that serve as explanations for linking cohabitation to fewer marital quality and satisfaction with their future spouse. The first theory comes from the Selection Perspective which argues that people who cohabit before marriage differ in certain characteristics from people that do not, and these negative attributes contribute to the lower marital quality. More specifically, these differences arise in terms of having a “low level of education, being poor, growing up with divorced parents, holding nontraditional attitudes toward marriage, and being nonreligious” (Kamp Dush, Cohan & Amato, 2003, pg. 540). The second perspective focuses on the experience of cohabitation as the cause. This perspective argues that there is something about the living style and arrangement of cohabitation that is related to a decrease in marital quality (Kamp Dush et al., 2003). This perspective assumes cohabitation changes both spouses in negative ways so that their marital satisfaction is undercut.

Cohabitation trends have been steadily shifting throughout the 21st century (Raley, 2000). Cohabitation has in fact become a normative experience in the United States. These trends have contributed to: men and women are waiting longer to marry; the rate of childbearing outside of marriage has increased, and the number of individuals who decide to never marry has risen (Raley, 2000). In the 1970s, “there were 500,000 cohabitating couples in the US. Recent estimates from the 2000 Census indicates that there are over 5 million cohabitating couples in America today” (US Census Bureau, 2001). Besides these three trends, divorce rates have also climbed. Taken together, these trends are consistent with the idea that for many adults,

cohabitation is not simply a stage before they wed, it is now displacing marriage altogether (Dnes, & Rowthorn, 2002).

The dramatic increase in cohabitation shows just how important researching this topic is especially since there is an association with later marital dissolution (Smock, 2000). Research shows that cohabitation is a major factor in marital instability and divorce (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989). Cohabitants are also at a disadvantage in their later marital relationship as they experience less satisfaction, “disagree more frequently, perceive less fairness in their relationship, and are also less happy with their relationship than their married counterparts” (Brown, 2004, pg. 3) Perhaps one reason for this is because cohabiters may have less commitment to the relationship. They may feel obligated to wed their significant other after living with them for several years, or if their significant other is pressuring them. Although they may oblige, it may be against their own best wishes. Consequently, this person may be less willing to invest time and effort into working difficulties into resolving their marriage and so the relationship quality may be doomed to suffer (Brown, 2004).

In comparing cohabiters and married couples, it is important to note that there are two distinct relationship types among cohabitants: those who plan to marry and those who will choose to remain single (Brown & Booth, 1996). The 75% of cohabitants that chose to marry their partner, have similar qualities of those married. That is, cohabiters are in lasting and committed relationships. Those cohabitating couples resemble married couples in that they share a common household, and share a long-term, sexually exclusive partner (Brown & Booth, 1996). On the other side, the majority of the 25% of cohabiters that do not plan on marrying their partner, report much lower relationship quality (Brown & Booth, 1996).

Marriage and cohabitation possess important differences, but comparing them is a challenge. Nock notes that both marriage and cohabitation have important “structural and institutional aspects” that make them different from one another (1995). Furthermore, both arrangements are “a complex category containing individuals with diverse perspectives, aims, and relationships” (Manning and Smock, 2002, as cited in Thornton, Axinn & Xie, 2007, pg.76). When couples merely cohabit, often times the boundaries for sharing a household can be fuzzy and arbitrary, something that married couples rarely have to negotiate (Thornton et al., 2007). Furthermore, trying to find commonalities between cohabitation and marriage can be somewhat confusing as the meaning of cohabitation can be different for all couples. There are many different kinds of cohabitations, each with different long term goals (Thornton et al., 2007). Some cohabitating couples refer to themselves as singles and act and behave with separate individual lifestyles, as singles do. This is in contrast to others with marriage plans who view themselves as married couples and behave as such in terms of sexual exclusivity and shared division of labor in the home (Brown & Booth, 1996).

In this section I will discuss three general arguments that can be made to describe how marriage and cohabitation relationships differ from one another. First, couples in cohabitation and marriage may differ in terms of expectations and role-specialization. Second, levels of commitment may vary for couples who cohabit compared to married couples. Finally, I will discuss other overarching differences from both the marriage and cohabitation perspectives. Later, I will review the research on whether couples who cohabit before they marry are at a greater, lesser, or equal advantage at marriage stability and marriage satisfaction than married couples who do not cohabit. That is, does the timing of when couples decide to cohabit in their relationship seem to play a role?

4.1 Expectations

The idea that cohabitation may negatively affect the marriage quality has become a growing concern. Is the increasing number of cohabitants threatening the institution of marriage? (Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004). Steven Nock (1995) has looked at the relationship quality between cohabitating and married couples. He distinguished the married, between those that previously cohabitated and ones that did not and found that once cohabitating couples became married, their relationship quality change. Although many cohabiters expect that marriage would “improve their emotional and economic security, improve their sex lives, their relationships with their parents and their overall happiness” couples who previously cohabitated found that their relationship quality suffered (Brown, 2004, pg. 4).

These findings may be surprising since it seems plausible that couples who live together would have stronger marriages. What about cohabitation makes couples experience a decrease in their relationship quality and possibly increase their risk for divorce? One possible explanation is that many couples tend to quickly transition from cohabitation to marriage without discussing what this new role and title means for their future, how things will change and what they both expect out of the new relationship (Manning & Smock, 2005). DeMaris and Leslie assert that perhaps the differences we find in once previously cohabitating couples and married couples that did not cohabit is in the people themselves. That is, individuals may be less willing to subscribe to the role expectations of marriage. Cohabitation grants them more freedom. They can do their own laundry, or chose not to. However, once married, husbands and wives may expect more out of each other and often times, men and women do not comply. DeMaris and Leslie argue that because of this, it is not so much cohabitation itself that is a risk factor for marital dissatisfaction, but the beliefs and expectations of these future husbands and wives (1984).

DeMaris and Leslie (1984) are two researchers that illustrate this point in their 1984 study. They, like many people, assumed that married couples who previously cohabitated would have an advantage over couples that did not, believing they would have become accustomed and learned the expectations involved in their relationship. That is, they were used to living together, sharing household chores, and so forth. Their results showed this was not the case.

DeMaris and Leslie found that cohabitating couples seem to expect more out of their relationships once married, although, they were often disappointed when their high expectations were not met. When men become husbands, they often decreased the amount of time they spent completing housework and everyday chores, like laundry, because they assumed their wife would take care of it. In that sense, cohabitating men were found to be more willing to participate more in housework because they knew it will attract their partner more, yet once, married, they retracted from their once thoughtful actions (1984). One hypothesis why men work contribute less in marriage than cohabitation is because cohabitation is a chance to impress one's future spouse, and so men may put forth more effort in housework, yet once married, men become lazy in household chores, since divorce or separation is an unlikely solution for newlywed couple (DeMaris & Leslie, 1984).

The timing of cohabitation helps to organize these new roles. Research findings on this idea have been consistent. Cohabitation could be either a detriment or an advantage depending on when couples decide to enter into the union (Brown & Booth, 1996). Those who cohabit while engaged appear to have as satisfying and rewarding relationships as those who are married. This may be because they choose to live together as though they are married, and thus when they actually wed, they do not have to alter their previous living arrangement or division of household chores. Couples who cohabit prior to engagement however, report different levels of

relationship satisfaction and quality. These couples show both a higher rate of dissatisfaction in their marriage and a greater risk for future divorce (Brown & Booth, 1996).

Differences between cohabitating couples and married couples are found mainly in the way couples plan and decide on their future expectations, household chores and other division of labor (Smock, 2000). Married couples have a different quality of relationship than cohabiters. Married couples tend to focus much more on a traditional style of division of labor than do cohabitating couples. They also differ in paid income; married couples typically have high salaries (Smock, 2000). The increased income has been speculated to come from the idea that married couples often have plans to start a family and begin working longer hours to provide for their family, and therefore earn a greater pay increase (Smock, 2000).

When couples decide to cohabit reveals much about their expectations. For those couples who enter cohabitation because it is a convenient living arrangement and have no intention of getting married, do not generally enter the relationship with the idea of permanence or develop the same long term commitment that married couples do (Smock 2000). Cohabiting relationships are usually viewed as either a trial period before marriage or as a tentative living arrangement that will sooner or later end in separation (Smock 2000). The way cohabiters define their relationship, whether simply cohabitating or planning to get married, has an impact on the expectations placed on each other.

Both marriage, and many types of cohabitating relationships expect each other to remain sexually exclusive to one another, although this expectation is much higher in marriage (Manning, Smock & Majumdar, 2004). Married couples also seem to display a more “connected feeling” between each other, whereas cohabitating couples exhibit fewer feelings of interconnectivity. They also do less sharing of expenses and income pooling compared to

married couples (Manning et al., 2004). Married couples take security and comfort in relying on each other for support, companionship and financial upkeep. Cohabiters, on the other hand, may be more invested in their own financial survival and may have friends who serve as a greater support system than their partner (Manning et al., 2004).

4.2 Commitment

There are currently 9.7 million unmarried, heterosexual couples living together (Gemici & Laufer, 2009). Some cohabitants admit that they choose to cohabit so they do not have to choose between being married and remaining single; they can in fact, experience the best of both worlds. This option becomes an important tradeoff that gives the advantages of marriages but allows individuals to avoid the disadvantages of being “tied down” (Gemici & Laufer, 2009). Perhaps another plus is that couples do not have a messy procedure in dissolving the arrangement as marriage often does, especially when children are involved. Therefore, couples are again able to enjoy the companionship and living style with another person, but do not need to be concerned or burdened by the legal responsibilities that comes with marriage (Gemici & Laufer, 2009). As Brien, Lillard and Stern (2006) conclude: “the lower cost of separation makes co-residential relationships attractive for couples, as it gives the opportunity to hedge against future bad shocks to the relationships quality while taking advantage of benefits of living together such as joining consumption of a public good, returns to specialization, and children” (pg. 451).

The lower stability of cohabiting unions may be because some cohabitations are a “trying out” stage for couples, and many of these types of relationships inevitably fail (Dnes, & Rowthorn, 2002). Couples often look to their cohabitating relationship as either a make or break decision, and therefore, they experience approximately five time greater separation rate than

married couples (Thorton, Axinn & Xie, 2007). They often believe that living with their significant other will answer their questions of whether their partner is right for them and if they wish to marry. Couples are seeing how they handle the cohabitation stage in order to assess their relationship. They seek to determine how compatible they are together. Surveys show that “three-fifths of young Americans today believe that cohabitation before marriage is helpful in avoiding divorce, and two-fifths of young Americans today say they would not marry someone who would not first live together” (Thorton, Axinn & Xie, 2007, pg.87).

In contrast, marriage signifies greater commitment. Couples who marry, whether they cohabitated before or not, report a higher degree of commitment compared to couples who merely cohabit (Brown, 2004). Once married, the level of commitment in the relationship increases as couples find “more happiness with and less instability in their relationships, fewer disagreements, and conflict resolution strategies characterized by more calm discussions” (Brown, 2004, pg. 15). Most young cohabiting couples still say they have a desire to marry, and thus once they do, the realization positively affects their relationship quality, causing them to feel happier and more fulfilled (Brown & Booth, 1996). An effect of having a higher relationship is found in couples increased commitment to one another.

4.3 Other Differences

Marriage and cohabitation are different in other respects. Cohabitation and married couples manage financial matters differently. Married couples spend less money on themselves and save more for the benefit of their family. They are also more likely to have joint bank accounts and family health insurance benefits (Nock, 1995). Besides the difference in wealth accumulation in married versus cohabiting households, cohabiters are found to have more

disagreements about money and their conflicting beliefs about the division of resources serve as stressors in their household (Nock, 1995).

One reason married couples are thought to make more money than cohabiters is that marriage increases men's salary (Manning, Smock & Majumdar, 2004). Married men take added on pressure to be the provider and breadwinner of the house and to be able to support their family. Young couples today are still reporting that they believe marriage serves as a gateway for childbearing, that children born in marriage are the proper way of conceiving and raising children. This can be observed by the higher rates of childbearing in married couples compared to cohabitating couples. Many cohabitating couples also agree with this, reporting that once pregnant, the expectation of a child will act as a motivational force to get married (Manning et al., 2004). However there is growing evidence that "more than one-half of the pregnancies occurring in cohabitating relationships are planned" suggesting that it may be becoming an increasingly acceptable context for bearing and raising children (Manning et al., 2004). Furthermore, there is a decrease in cohabitating couples who become pregnant and quickly enter marriage. Many more people are now choosing to stay cohabitating and not marrying (Manning et al., 2004). Nevertheless, a majority of individuals believe that marriage serves as the best context for raising children. Bearing and raising children within marriage has intrinsic and invaluable benefits that cohabiters are unable to experience. According to Waite and Gallagher "marriage is an institution that integrates the couple with the larger community, and cohabiting couples differ from most married couples in their relationship to the church, the state, the community" (Thorton et al., 2007, pg. 83).

Another relationship affected by cohabitation and marriage is in the parent-child relationship, which seems to be more positive among marriage couples than it is for cohabitating

couples. Parents and other family members may not only be more accepting, but are also more involved in couples who choose to marry than those who decide to remain cohabitating (Nock, 1995). The term “exchanges of support” has been used to assess the quality of relationship between individuals, 19-30 years old, in cohabitating unions and their parents (Eggebeen, 2005). Results from the National Survey of Families and Households found that cohabitating couples were found to share less of the exchange support with their parents than those who were either married or single and not cohabitating. This meaning that compared to married couples, cohabitating individuals are much less likely to give, receive or expect help from their parents. They even state that they would not call upon their parents for assistance during emergencies. This could be in terms of giving and receiving financial help, advice and assisting in household chores (Eggebeen, 2005).

Cohabitating couples are receiving less support from their parents, even stating that their parents are not the ones they would call to for an emergency. Surprisingly enough, the length of time couples cohabitated did not relate to whether the exchange support with parents increased in quality. Reasons for this again have been thought to come from parents not supporting their child’s cohabitating relationship, or that individuals in a cohabitating arrangement have more distant relationship with their parents than married couples do (Eggebeen, 2005). Parents feel less obligated to lend their finances and other resources for a relationship that may not be long-term or stable. Individuals who feel as though their parents are not accepting of their relationship may choose to then retract communication and lose intimacy between their parents (Eggebeen, 2005). This adds evidence to the argument that the living style one participates in can have substantial effects on one’s personal relationships with others, most notably, with their parents.

5. The Future of Marriage

Marriage has changed considerably over the years and how it will continue to change is a concern for scholars. Although we cannot be certain about the future of marriage, scholars have developed theories based upon changes that occurred in earlier decades. Although many people still believe marriage is a sacred and valued union, today a growing number of couples are opting to cohabit instead (Cherlin, 2004). Other couples are delaying marriage, while many more are choosing not to marry at all. In the prior years, marriage, especially for women, was seen as a necessity, something they were dependent on for survival and financial security. Women today are obtaining higher levels of education and earning higher incomes; they are able to consequently live more independent lifestyles, and even raise children on their own if they decide to do so. This change has drastically altered reasons for marrying, and as a result, has changed the traditional institution of marriage. Andrew Cherlin has described marriage today:

“Marriage has evolved from a marker of conformity to a marker of prestige. Marriage is a status one builds up to, often by living with a partner beforehand, by attaining steady employment or starting a career, by putting away some savings, and even by having children. Marriage's place in the life course used to come before those investments were made, but now it often comes afterward. It used to be the foundation of adult personal life; now it is sometimes the capstone. It is something to be achieved through one's own efforts rather than something to which one routinely accedes” (2004, pg. 855).

Regardless of the changes in the institution, the meaning of marriage as a significant symbol and value for families has remained high (Cherlin, 2004). Ernest Burgess described the transition “from an institution to a companionship” (Burgess & Lock, 1945). In recent years, couples have become more interested in finding a mate that fills their emotional needs in order to obtain the high marital quality they desire (Cherlin, 2004). Many theorists believe that because

marriage is no longer a necessity for people, it is at risk of dying out (Cherlin, 2004; Burgess & Lock, 1945; Blankenhorn, 2003).

During this final section I will first highlight some of the recent changes in marriage. I will then describe two possible future outcomes of marriage, argued by two principal spokespersons in the field. The first is that marriage is in trouble, that is, more marriages are ending in divorce, cohabitation is replacing marriage, and the institution itself is weakening, and this is terrible. The second possible outcome is that marriage is not in trouble, but just changing and adapting to modern society. This second hypothesis asserts that marriage is becoming more individualized, more egalitarian, and will inevitably accommodate same-sex couples, and this is surely a good thing.

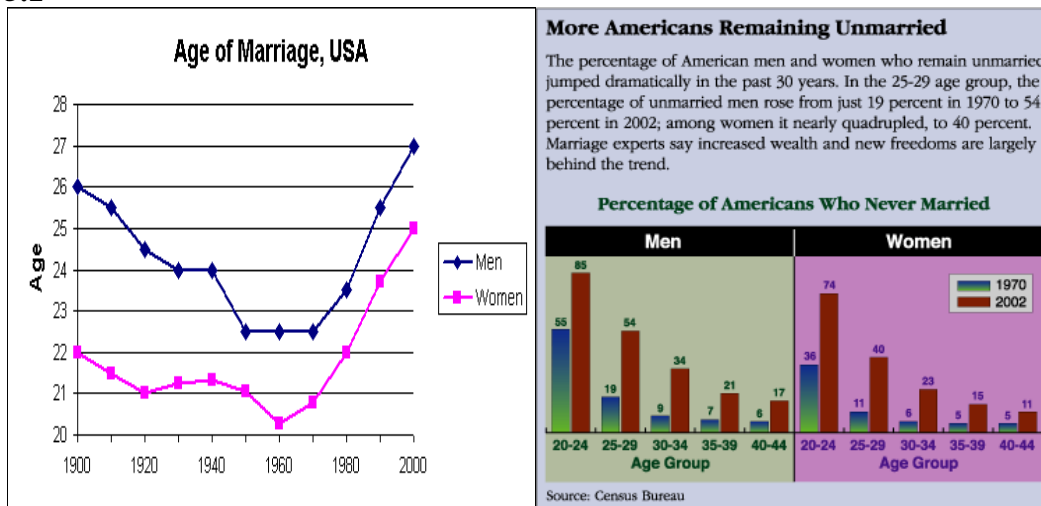
5.1 Rising age at marriage

As the needs and expectations we desire from marriage have changed, people look for a relationship that emphasizes greater personal choice and freedom, more physical and emotional responses from partners, and someone who will fulfill one's needs. These marriage expectations today contrast those in the past that was rooted more on finances and practicality (Masci, 2004). With today's changes in the meaning of marriage, many individuals are choosing to delay marriage by cohabitating or remaining single. They feel they can satisfy their own needs and be happier on their own than if they were to marry young (Masci, 2004). As a result, the average age of marriage for men and women has increased.

Individuals are no longer simply settling for financial security and the ability to have children. When couples wed today they have higher expectations of their spouse and of the relationship (Cherlin, 2004). Individuals now seek "personal growth and deeper intimacy

through more open communication and mutually shared disclosures about feelings with their partners” (Cherlin, 2004, pg. 853). Finding the right person today often takes longer than it did in the 1960s, when couples felt more pressure to choose a mate in one’s 20’s. Individuals are now finding their “soul mates” later, with women having an average age of marriage at 25 and men at 27, as cited in figure 5. 1. As figure 5.1 also shows, there was a thirty-five percent increase in unmarried 25- 29 year olds from 1970 to 2002. Importantly enough, there is also a growing number of individuals who are choosing to never marry at all (Cherlin, 2004).

Figure 5.1



(*"The First Measured Century,"* 2000). (Masci, 2004).

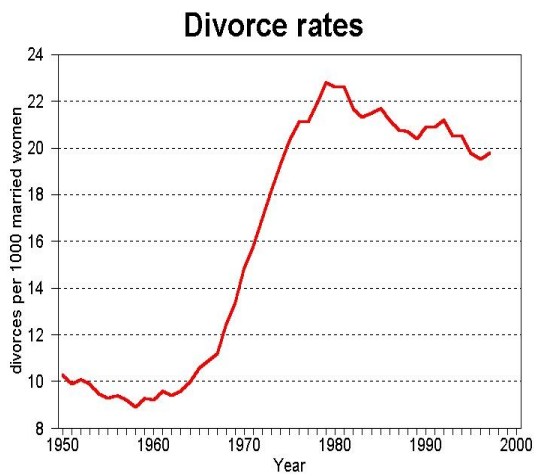
5.2 Changes in divorce rates

Fewer couples are treating marriage as a lasting and permanent relationship. Couples are becoming less concerned about the longevity of their relationship, while divorce is steadily becoming the norm. In fact, the large increase in U.S. divorces, as shown in figure 5.2, between 1960 and 1980 is a strong indicator of the deinstitutionalization of marriage (Clark, 1996; Masci, 2004).

Demographers estimate that nearly fifty percent of U.S. marriages will end in divorce. Looking at American households today, we are finding that nearly fifty percent of U.S. marriages are ending in divorce. Similarly, just in the last 50 years, “the percentage of American households headed by married couples has fallen from nearly 80 percent to an all-time low of 50.7 percent” (Masci, 2004, pg. 122). Because one’s level of freedom and choice are increasing, more people are deciding to end their marriage as they believe it restricts their freedom and confines (Masci, 2004). People enter marriage because of their own individualistic goals, and so are more insisting now to end the marriage if the relationship is not satisfying them.

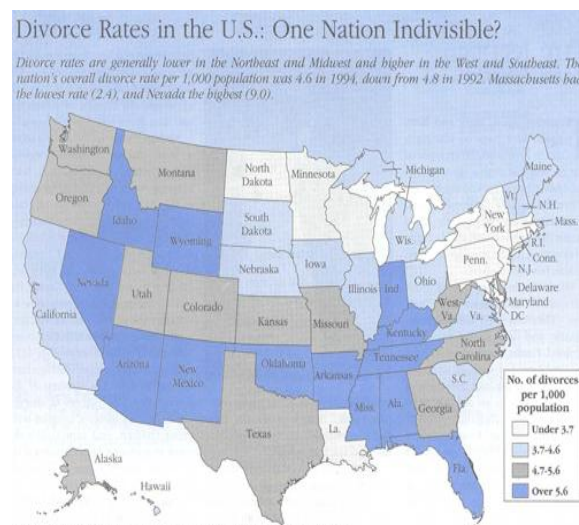
Not only is the divorce rate in the U.S. extremely high, the ability to end a marriage, and obtain a divorce by the court of law, has become easier. Divorce laws were originally designed to keep marriages intact, by only allowing divorce in certain circumstances, such as infidelity or abuse (Masci, 2004). Today, marriage can be dissolved by either party for any reason. Family and friends do not look down upon a divorce as heinously as they did in the past. Neither law nor social cast makes couples stay together and resolve their differences.

Figure 5.2



Source: Monthly Vital Statistics Reports

(Monthly Vital Statistics Reports, 2000).



Source: Family Research Council, National Center for Health Statistics

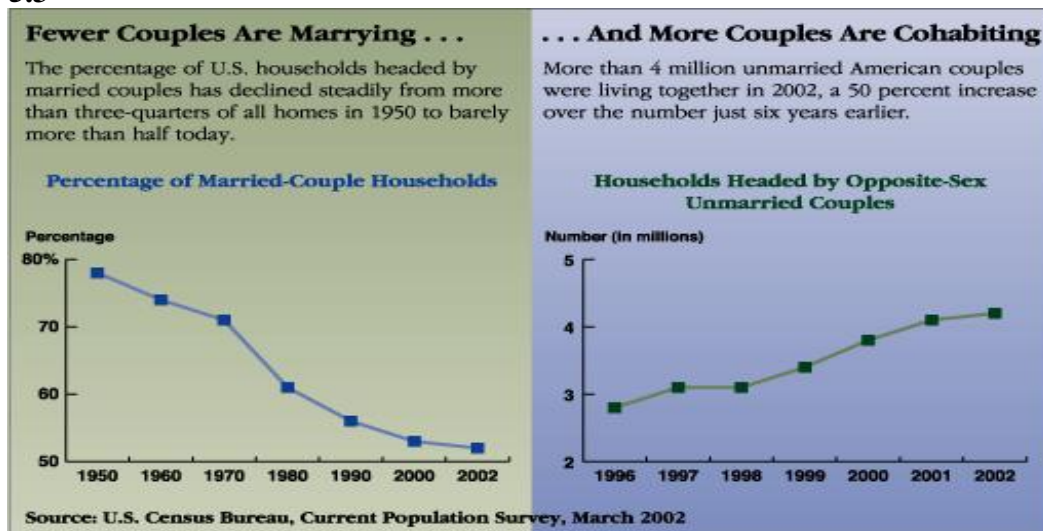
(Clark, 1996).

5.3 Rise in cohabitation

A second feature of the “process of deinstitutionalization” of marriage that Cherlin (2004) discusses is the rise of cohabitating couples, shown in figure 5.3. Past years, cohabitation was often a short time interval as couples quickly ended the relationship or moved into marriage. Now, however, cohabitation is becoming more like marriage, in that it affirms long-lasting, committed couples (Cherlin, 2004).

Many scholars speculate that the United States will become similar to Europe, where cohabitation and single parenthood are as popular as marriage. Arguments to support this concern come from the statistic that “between 1996 and 2002, the number of cohabitating couples rose from 2.8 million to nearly 4.3 million, a trend that is expected to continue in the coming years” (Masci, 2004, pg. 122).

Figure 5.3



(Masci, 2004).

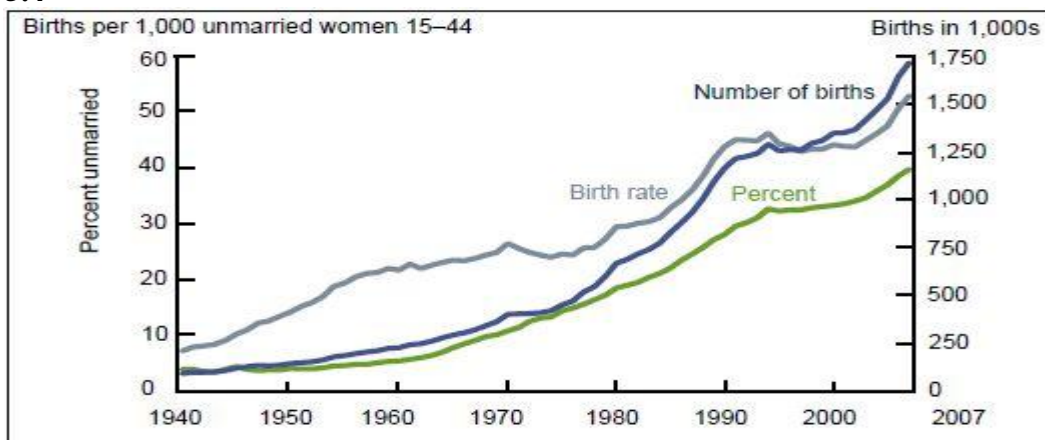
5.4 Rise in non-marital childbearing

Cherlin (2004) argues that a third indicator that marriage as an institution has been weakening is the rise in out of wedlock births. In prior years, childbirth mainly happened among

married couples. In today's society roughly 1 out of 3 children are born out of wedlock (U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, 2003).

Today, there is less of a social stigma on single mothers or children raised in a cohabitating household. With women no longer needing to marry to survive financially, women can have and raise children in a cohabitating relationship or solely on their own, if they so desire. Combined with the rise in divorce, today married couples with children only consist of thirty-five percent of American households. This number has risen to twenty percent today (Masci, 2004). Looking at these statistics in another way, the “percentage of children raised in single-parent households jumped, tripling in the last 40 years—from 9.4 percent in 1960 to 28.5 percent in 2002” (Masci, 2004, pg. 124). With the greater acceptance in out of wed-lock births, and the decrease in pressure and social norms to marry, women are opting to have or adopt a child on their own, resulting in the rise of non-marital childbirths.

Figure 5.4



SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Vital Statistics System.

“Number of births, birth rate, and percentage of births to unmarried women: United States, 1940-2007” (National Vital Statistics System, 2007).

5.5 Blankenhorn versus Stacey

So what does the future of marriage hold? There are two opposing sides to the story. In order to illustrate the different arguments, I will use the work of David Blankenhorn and Judith Stacey to describe two possible futures of marriage. Blankenhorn believes that marriage will continue to decline and this unfortunate outcome will negatively affect families and society as a whole (Blankenhorn, 2003). He offers several ways to reverse the decline in marriage in hopes it will save the institution and families. Judith Stacey will serve as the counterpart to Blankenhorn. She argues that although marriage is changing and evolving, families and children will not be harmed. She asserts that marriage and family changes are a natural part of a changing society. She contends that we need to adapt and embrace American changes and focus more on how to build and strengthen the wide diversity families (Stacey, 1998).

David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute for American Values, and author of *The Marriage Problem*, believes we witnessed the institution of marriage become gradually and substantially weaker over the past several decades and this is harmful for adults, children and society (Blankenhorn, 2003). Blankenhorn sees a loss of a sense of familism, since individuals have become more concerned with values, such as “individualism and consumerism” (2003, pg. 61). Blankenhorn, as well as other scholars in the field, argue that the decline and weakening of the institution of marriage has become a “genuine societal crisis” (2003, pg. 61). Blankenhorn argues that marriage decline is a big societal problem because “it drives or sustains a diversity of social problems such as child poverty, weapons-related violence, educational failure, teen suicide, child and adolescent mental health problems, teen pregnancy, and many others” (2003, pg. 62). Blankenhorn describes one example to illustrate his point, stating that “one of every three divorces in the United States resulting in the physical separation of a father from his children

plunges the mother and children into poverty. Father absence due to marital failure is a primary cause of child poverty in the United States” (2003, pg. 62).

Implications of these trends, he worries, will be that marriage will be viewed as just another acceptable and possible option of family life. Blankenhorn strongly believes that every child should be given the chance to have a mother and a father (Miller, 2009). He argues that marriage is the one social institution that grants this, and so in order to protect our children, marriage needs to be rescued (Miller, 2009). Blankenhorn also notes that as a society we are close to legalizing same-sex marriages. Blankenhorn is unwilling to accept this change as he argues it denies the essence of procreation and “threatens the continuing existence of marriage as a serious institution” (Shell, 2007, pg. 565). Although Blankenhorn worries that marriage may no longer socially useful and therefore, may become gradually extinct (Shell, 2007). He also believes “We’re a pair-bonding species, and we have a deep need at the species level to love and be loved by another and a need to pass on a part of ourselves to the next generation. Marriage is the institution that encompasses these two great needs” (Masci, 2004, pg. 122).

Blankenhorn agrees with Cherlin in that he sees American marriages have become identified with self interest and self-orientation, which places one’s own needs and desires above that of one’s spouse and children. This, Blankenhorn fears, is what our society is coming to. Marriage was once about the interests of the family, yet, today cohabitation and divorce are on the rise, because Americans have taken a greater interest in their own selves (Popenoe et al., 1996). Marriage and parenthood was once a shared experience between a husband and a wife, yet today, these two aspects are growing further apart. Furthermore, Blankenhorn asserts that there “is the greater tendency to see marriage and parenthood as individual pursuits rather than socially defined roles” (Popenoe et al., 1996, pg. 4). In summary, Blankenhorn worries that

individuals are no longer getting married and having children because it is no longer a socially expected transition or a requirement to reach adulthood. These achievements are a part of mere individualistic goals today. Blankenhorn worries that along these individualistic goals, children's emotional and physical well-being will be threatened. Not only will a decrease in marriage be harmful for children's development, but the entire family and society will be negatively affected (Blankenhorn, 2003).

Judith Stacey takes an opposing stand on the future of marriage. She has a more positive view of the changes in marriage than Blankenhorn. Judith Stacey is a sociology professor and writer on the issues of the family, feminism and same-sex couples (Hardy, 2004). Stacey has devoted much of her time to examining changes in the family structure and interpreting how historical and societal changes in America will inevitably affect the shaping of American families (Hardy, 2004). Stacey's numerous writings argue that the definition of the family should be expanded and accepted by western society (Hardy, 2004). For example, Stacey believes that same-sex couples raising children has no detrimental effect on a child's development or well-being (Hardy, 2004). Stacey argues that same-sex marriages are just one way that marriage will be changing in the future, and instead of viewing this change as an example of the decline of marriage, we should be embracing what marriage stands for, and to open up a wider definition of marriage for the benefit of couples, children and society (Hardy, 2004).

Using one of Ed Fisher's quotes, he states that "We used to be old-fashioned. Now we're postmodern" (1989). Judith Stacey, an advocate for the changing institution of marriage, takes a stand similar to Fisher. Many more families are founded on single parenthood, same-sex couples, cohabitation and remarriages today. Stacey believes we should be accepting of these new family living arrangements, as they are not necessarily suggesting that marriage as an institution is

suffering today (Stacey, 1998). Stacey argues that we as a society need to expand our views on what constitutes a family, for the majority of families are no longer, two biological parents and their children.

The term family, as Stacey describes, is a term used in Western cultures. She explains that many cultures around the world do not even use the term “family” to describe the people with whom they live, and those societies that do use the term “family” do so to encompass the wide range of relationships they have and the different meanings those relationships hold (Stacey, 1996). Stacey believes the U.S. should take a similar stance.

A growing number of families are comprised of multi-generations, step-parents and step-children, same-sex parents, cohabitating couples and much more (Masci, 2004). There has already been changes in the way our society is adapting to new forms of living arrangements and households. For example, some major companies are reexamining the way that the “family” is defined. Already, “40 percent of the nation’s largest 500 companies have reexamined their ‘marriage-centric’ benefit policies. For instance, Bank of America has redefined “family to include non-traditional household members-such as domestic partners or adult children living at home” (Masci, 2004, pg. 123).

Stephanie Coontz, author of *A History of Marriage*, argues that “Americans now have too many choices-due to new technologies and economic and social opportunities-and it would take a level of repression unacceptable to nearly everyone to force us to begin marrying and stay married at the same levels we once did” (Masci, 2004, pg. 124). With the rise of cohabitation and various alternatives to the American households, it seems impossible that we go on with a misunderstanding or a narrow view of what makes a family.

Stacey goes on to argue that “the family is not an institution, but an ideological, symbolic construct that has a history and a politics” (1993, pg. 545). The family in prior years consisted of the male as the head of the household, and the female as the homemaker, both her and the children as dependants and inferiors to the husband. Today, few families resemble this depiction, yet we still consider the husband, wife and children as a family unit. Even while the family changes in form and function, society still believes in the idea of “the family”. Stacey is simply arguing that just as the family as changed in prior years, it will continue to change and branch out, yet the ideas and values of the family will remain valuable (Stacey, 1993). Stacey’s main message is that we have to adapt to how our society is changing and realize that changes in marriage will be an effect of that. Realizing that our once first perceptions and definitions of marriage can be adapted and evolved, we can see that the term “family” means so much more than biological DNA. In summary, Stacey believes that the fundamental change of society today has to be the acceptance of how we are defining the word “family” (Stacey, 1993). We need to be embracing the social, cultural, historical and economic changes that America has gone through and understand that marriage has changed as a result, yet this is not harmful for children, families or society.

In conclusion, what can be said about the future of marriage? Even though Blankenhorn and Stacey offer sound arguments, demographers are just as unsure themselves. In order for there to be a reinstitutionalization of marriage, several things would need to reappear. First, it would require there be a rise in couples who got married, an increase in childbirths to married couples, and just as importantly, a decline in divorce rates (Cherlin, 2004). Another factor that would have to change is a reversal of the individualistic goals and movement towards a focus on the benefits of the family (Cherlin, 2004). Additionally, it would also most likely require a decline in

the women's paid labor force as well as families going back to the previously traditional gender typed family roles (Cherlin, 2004). According to many theorists, this way of visualizing the future is unlikely and improbable, and I have to agree.

6. Final Thoughts

Although marriage is an institution that may weaken, I believe marriage is an intrinsic good that will never go out of style. People continue to desire marriage (Cherlin, 2004). Marriage may be changing in average ages, and reasons for why people wed, but people are still reporting that finding a spouse and getting married is a top priority for them. I think that marriage will remain deinstitutionalized in the future because of cultural, historical and societal changes, yet it will remain as something common and privileged in society. Marriage is still being seen as a special kind of relationship valued and appreciated by our society and American families (Cherlin, 2004).

With regard to the rise in divorce rates, I feel that the same number of people would have ended their marriages sixty years ago, perhaps even more so than today, if they did not depend on financial security and were obligated to stay married by social norms and family expectations. I actually believe more marriages would have fallen apart in prior years since marriages were not based on love and strong emotional connections. Today's couples do. My hope is that divorce rates begin to decline, and I think the government should take a more rigid policy for granting divorce, preventing couples who are too quick to give up and work through their relationship problems.

Although it seems that cohabitation is taking the place of marriage, I still believe that people intend to marry. With more individuals delaying marriage to pursue further education and to seek their own individualistic dreams and exploration, it would only make sense that they would opt to cohabit during more of their early adulthood years. Furthermore, there remains pressure for young adults to wed, whether that pressure comes from society, their families or

themselves. Today people are still reporting a desire to marry, although the age of when this is occurring is later (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

For many individuals, marriage is a sacrament, and the marriage ceremony in a place of worship legitimizes one's relationship in the witness of God, family and friends and to the couples themselves. Most couples who marry want to take advantage of the legal and financial benefits of marriage. Many think that having children in this setting is best. Couples also want to take advantage of having a stronger tie to their community (Lewin, 2004). Studies on poor individuals found them to believe that, "marriage is a form of social bragging about the quality of the couple relationship, a powerfully symbolic way of elevating one's relationship above others in the community, particularly in a community where marriage is rare" (Cherlin, 2004, pg. 855). The added benefits of married couples over singles and cohabitating are still prompting many couples to tie the knot.

As for the acceptance and legalization of same-sex couples, I believe they have turned marriage into something worth fighting for. It would seem that they are the ones who are most adamant about bringing about the true meaning of marriage, of unconditional love and faithfulness, two core values in the institution. It may just be that these couples will remind others of what love is and why we should be marrying in the first place. Perhaps, it will take the legalization of same-sex marriages to increase marriage rates among all Americans (Lewin, 2004).

I do agree with Stacey in that we need to expand our views on the family. Our society has changed drastically during the last sixty years, and marriage is one major area that was affected, but we need to realize that change is not necessarily a bad thing. It is only to be expected that with the change in women's education and paid labor rights we would see marked changes in the

reasons women decide to wed. To me, even as the changes in marriage and family evolve, it is still held as something sacred, and something to be desired and sought after by Americans.

Although marriage may be less popular among some, it is still proving to be the best form of expressing one's love and commitment. Those who marry report it being a relationship that is "an intensely private spiritualized union, combining sexual fidelity, romantic love, emotional intimacy, and togetherness" (Whitehead & Popenoe, 2001, pg. 13).

We know that married couples, in comparison to divorced and single individuals, are better off-financially, physically, sexually and emotionally. Therefore, I, as well as many other marriage advocates, are hoping that the government and policy makers do more to promote marriage and reduce the rate of divorces in our country (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007). This, however, is assuming that all marriages are happy and that people would be better off staying together than divorced. It can be stated, nonetheless, that overall people are much happier and healthier when married, and so our government should do more to protect the institution and to promote marriage as something sacred and eternal (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007).

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Academic Vita of Michelle LaPenta

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Major: Human Development and Family Studies

Honors: 2010 Schreyer Honors College graduate with honors in Human Development and Family Studies

Thesis Title: Marriage: Overview of Benefits and Future Direction in the United States

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. David J. Eggebeen

OBJECTIVE

To obtain a full-time position in the helping or human services profession, with a special interest in marriage and family counseling.

EDUCATION

Fall 2006-Spring 2010

- The Pennsylvania State University, University Park PA 16801
- BS in the honors college of Health and Human Development, in the area of Human Development and Family Studies- Lifespan Developmental Science Option.
- My overall GPA: 3.8, my major GPA: 4.0.
- Graduation Date: Spring 2010.

RELEVANT COURSES

HDFS 129H-Introduction to Human Development and Family Studies

HDFS 301-Values and Ethics in Health and Human Development Professions

HDFS 311-Human Development and Family Studies Interventions

HDFS 312W-Empirical Inquiry in Human Development

HDFS 315-Family Development

HDFS 414-Resolving Human Development and Family Problems

HDFS 477-Analysis of Family Problems

EXPERIENCE

Summer 2006-Present

Human Services Experience

- I have volunteered at Jeanes Hospital to gain firsthand experience and interact with the patients and tend to some of their more basic needs.
- I have worked in a day care center where I assisted teachers working with young preschool children; I have also observed infants in their classroom on the Penn State Campus on numerous occasions to learn more about the age group.

HONORS/AWARDS

Fall 2006-Present

- dean's list every semester in college.
- I had been selected as the Student Employee of the Semester twice in two years, at the Food Services where I work at as a crew leader.
- I had written a biography of Saint John Neumann and was fortunate enough to have it published a few weeks later in the *Pennsylvania Center for the Book*.

SKILLS**Spring 2009-Present****Data Software:**

- I have been working extensively on my thesis using the SPSS software and I have even been asked to help teach students younger than me how to work through data analyses